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THE MIRROR IN THE DUSK

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THE VALLEY OF THE SQUINTING WINDOWS

THE CLANKING OF CHAINS

THE MIRROR IN THE DUSK

BY BRINSLEY MACNAMARA

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To my Wife

THE FIRST REFLECTION

THE MIRROR IN THE DUSK

CHAPTER I

The children came adventurously across the old broken fences into the wild, weedy orchard of the crab trees. It was a way more in keeping with the desertion and desolation of the orchard to come like this rather than up the grass-grown boreen and through all the wooden gates with their lichened, half-rotten bars. At the last fence they paused, and their bare legs gleamed whitely against the rank profusion of the untended hedge. It was Saturday morning, and the day in itself stood for release from school and the freedom of the fields. Their young, bright minds were filled with gladness, and amid all the wild wonder of the grassy spaces there was no place at all that held the same lure as the crab-tree orchard. It was a place that never seemed lonely like the low lakes of the valley or the hills all splashed with golden furze up which one climbed into the rich, windy fields. It never seemed to hold to itself any life of pain making a pang of separation to flow into their hearts when the evening fell. There was something lovely that seemed to linger about it always hiding affectionately what life or death it held from all mean, sad things. No beautiful place out of a fairy story had ever been contrived by telling to their minds, and so the eyes of all their longing reached out to this place. . . . And the crabs were not a bit like other crabs. They were sweet, sweet nearly as apples and, besides, they were forbidden fruit, and without a single trace of sourness.

The children, there were four of them, Breedh

Growney, Fanny Soraghan, Oliver Moyles and Seumas Darcy, having crossed the ditch began to steal timidly through the high grass of the deserted place. Their minds were all shaken by the little joy of what they were doing. . . .

It was not on every Saturday of the year that they could come here, for the crabs were left untaken for only a short while, and they were darkly forbidden to come into the orchard by the man who tended all the fields about the loveliest place in the whole wide world, the fierce, ugly man with his wicked dog, the solitary human who was given a living out of all this rich place, and who had been brought here by Colonel Montagu Marlay. . . .

" Colonel Montagu Marlay, may the devil have him and his seed, breed and generation ! "

They had heard their fathers saying the like of this without knowing quite what it meant beyond feeling that it made them more afraid of the man and the dog, two creatures of affright that stood to their minds for some part of the very devil himself that Colonel Montagu Marlay must surely be even in the very sound of his name. Hence their hushed manner now and the quiet advance of them into the orchard, hands tightly clasped and looks of fear making little tears to glisten in their eyes. . . . The trees in the orchard, the trees of delight, were hidden by higher trees of copper beech, whose dark leaves now shone like thin, polished sheets of the same metal hammered together into a kind of shapeless dome beneath the high, sunny arch of the wide sky. . . .

Here and there amongst the grass were the mouldering remains of what must have been the walls of houses, all that was left now of the rude mud walls of little cabins which had once sheltered whole happy, laughing families. In spots even these remains of human habitation were quite melted away. The earth and the

grass had crept over them, till they were mere shapeless mounds looking almost like graves of the now nearly forgotten dead.

The children, as if held by the crush of memories which crowded in as a mighty echo of love sounding all around and about this place where other children just like themselves had once laughed and played without fear, perhaps, and maybe fearful because of some word that their fathers, too, had spoken of deeds of hate and blood, stopped to look curiously at these traces of the now cold and silent homes. Their little talk came breaking tremulously through their fear.

"And there were people living here once?"

"They were very weeshey houses."

"I suppose they went away and got bigger houses?"

"Some of them went to America. I often heard my mother saying that."

"But what happened them that they all went?"

"They were evicted, my father told me."

"What's evicted?"

"They were flung out on the road."

And thus they went on, their talk running merely into one question. . . . And because no answer would come to their minds there fell the solitary, sad feeling on them that some pitiful thing had happened here. The little girls seemed to cling closer to one another as if stirred more than the boys in the presence of this disaster of the home. . . . It made them think of their own homes. . . . They thought, too, of the day when Anthony Duffy, the boldest boy going to school, had terrified them by his wickedness in robbing all the birds' nests. He had broken the eggs in some and from the others, with a stick, had dashed the little, cheeping, young things out on the road. And to see the poor little birds dying upon the road! And the mothers crying out, their eyes looking so small and wild as they circled around and around the ruined nests! . . .

The realisation of the tragedy was perhaps a stronger thing when it hurried into the mind of the boys. . . . But they remained sullen, speaking no word while the girls were almost crying. They had heard the passionate stories of their elders by the fireside on many a winter evening, the whole life histories with their tragic endings of the fine, decent families that had once lived here. Old Andy Giveney, with his immense memory and the ancient fire that lingered in him, was able to make anyone see again all the life as had been lived here in these little homes near by the crab-tree orchard. He could hold you from play or from wandering through the fields by the spell of his talk, for he had become renowned as the lonely chronicler of the fields of Dheel. . . . He had been a Fenian in his day, "a proud, noble Fenian man," as he described himself, and from his dimming eyes when he talked leaped some of the fire of that faith. He must have talked to their fathers just as he talked to them. . . . Seumas Darcy had once heard his father say :

"Wasn't it marvellous to think that we could never get the right and proper crack at Montagu ?"

And to this the father of Oliver Moyles had replied darkly :

"Sure he had a kind of a charmed life, so he had, that he got from the Ould Boy himself. And devil a use it was, though we made our best of it many's the time. D'ye remember the night we waited for him at The Hill of the White Lady, thinking to get him for certain that time and how he was on the far side of the car from us for the first time in his life, and we couldn't give him the charge."

"Aye, and it where his ould father was shot and all, you'd nearly think that something might have been kind enough to break the spell in that place on the same night, but somehow or another it didn't."

Old Andy Giveney always cleaned his tongue by

spitting out most ostentatiously after he had mentioned the name of Colonel Montagu Marlay. And if the night were dark as he came down to the *celidh* in any house of the valley, he was always sure to say, either to strike terror into the youngsters, or to create the necessary atmosphere around himself: "Begannies, d'ye know what it is? Just and I coming up the road now I thought I felt some quare, bad thing slipping by me in the dark. It was something not right, I can tell you, and not belonging to this side of the world nor to any bit of goodness with the spark of religion in it at all. Begad, it was like a mad dog or a crying ghost or Colonel Montagu Marlay or the devil himself or some quare yoke that was after coming straight from th'other place upon the instant minute. Be the holy, it was me got the fright of my life, I can tell you, and the cold sweat began to come dreeping out through me and that's as sure as you're there."

And now, as the boys looked upon the ruins of the little houses that Colonel Marlay and his ancestors had made, out of their malevolence and the wrong for which they stood, a little flush of passion passed through them, and they felt that when they had come to the years of discretion they, too, should curse the seed, breed and generation of that monster in human form just as their fathers and old Andy Giveney were always doing. But they were only children still, and so there was little difference in the way of any thought out of remembrance that could last for long between them and the girls. They lifted their young, bright eyes from the ruined places. They passed on, keeping as far as possible from a detached bush here and there around which there might be fallen thorns to bleed and inflame their feet, and here and there a *punkawn* remaining too, a trace of vegetation, for lovely green things had flourished here near the flesh and blood which had here been housed. . . . But they were talking again, making

another little conversation of wonder, again connecting the talk of their elders with the present disposition of these traces of vegetation. Whether such and such a stump had been that of a tree that had once been shelter for the little house of the Holmeses, whether this bush or that had marked the far or the near end of Cullen's garden. They fell into a childish dispute as the wonderment of each led to a question which none of the others could answer. Little Breedh Growney began to cry when they all laughed at her questions. Then in a moment they were glad and almost thoughtless again. They began a game of skipping and jumping across the almost obliterated furrows which remained as traces of the gardens' cultivation. The ridges had been high and green, maybe, when the winter shadow of Marlay had fallen, a sudden blighting, and those who had planted the ridges had never come to know the joy of the digging. The ridges were surely like the grass-grown mounds of graves and the remains of the houses like tombstones in some forgotten meadow of the dead. The scene when fully discovered, as it had been in a way, by them, held a great pathos. Yet, strange to say, it was here, after they had fully seen and almost fully felt, that they now chose to resume their merriment, which had momentarily been checked by the things they had come to see through this almost precocious effort of their minds. . . Now they were just at the feet of the beech trees beyond which the trees of ripe and shining crabs were clustered. . . .

Seumas Darcy was already climbing up one of the trees. He was accomplished in climbing, and they stood to watch him. Soon he was up above branches which hid him from their view. . . . Now he had shaken one of the weightiest, topmost branches and the very best crabs on the tree were popping down upon their heads. Oliver was reaching up with a stick, and making the crabs fly hither and thither from a lower

branch as he struck out joyously. Seumas slid down successfully, the patches on his breeches now all torn open from the climbing. The others were chattering and laughing around him. There was an immediate competition between the girls as to which of them could put the greatest number of crabs into her pinafore. Breedh seemed just upon the point of winning—" fifty-six, fifty-seven, fifty-eight "—but the flimsy material had been burst by the weight and all the bright fruit was spilled upon the ground. Out of the strange cruelty of children the others were laughing, and she sat down to mend the pinafore with two safety pins. She cried in bitter confusion as Fanny went on gathering and counting. The boys were filling their pockets until these were bulging, almost bursting. In addition they had tied their gallowses around their waists and were stuffing more crabs underneath their shirts. Just for a moment the little, round fruit which did not pack very well felt so cold and smooth against their skin. . . . Breedh had already repaired her pinafore and was busily picking up the crabs that she had spilled.

Through their minds now were running thoughts of all the play the crabs would bring when they had fetched them proudly home like grand prizes won from the day. Breedh and Fanny intended to roast theirs amongst the coals of the turf fire, or else make jelly or pies. Oliver and Seumas would keep some in their pockets to show their timid companions of the school that they had not been afraid to come to the orchard, more to swap or hool for buttons and marbles, and still more to fling about their houses so that their fathers and Andy Giveney might see them and speak proudly of the fine bit of a thing they had done. Their little expedition to the orchard might thus come to appear as something in the nature of an attack upon the power and significance of Colonel Marlay.

" Aren't they young, venturesome childer ? But, of course, they have a bit of their fathers' pluck in them.

" My tutoring was never lost on anyone yet, however young. I say it was never lost. Nor it never can be lost, the fine, ferocious teaching of my burning mind ! "

But now suddenly there came to the ears of the four children the heavy sound of someone striving to break hurriedly through dense undergrowth and the hot, excited barking of a dog. It was the man . . . and the dog. . . . Their brightly coloured world had been blackened in an instant, and surrounding them now closely, crushingly, was only the darkness of fear. . . . Already they were at the old gate and its bars were treacherously giving way as they scrambled through. The old grass-grown boreen back to the road and their fathers' and mothers' houses had never before appeared so long and straight. . . . When they glanced back just once or twice in their mad race all they could see was an evil, sweating face filling up the view behind. Above the barking of the dog their consciousness almost felt the sound of wild blasphemies ringing out over the still fields. . . .

They had made good their escape and so their little hearts were panting towards gladness again. . . . The dog was now barking only intermittently in vexation far up near the crab-tree orchard. . . . But suddenly they were tired and sat down by the roadside. They were bitter, too, with disappointment, and their eyes met in broken, tearful looks. . . . The girls had dropped all the crabs from their pinafores in fright upon the man's coming and the boys had lost all theirs, too, as they ran. The great adventure of their day appeared only a mean failure now. They were all silent for ever so long. Then Oliver Moyles jumped up and said, his thin voice sounding queerly with the thickness of passion that came into it :

" Colonel Montagu Marlay, may the devil have him and his seed, breed and generation ! "

" Oh, that's a curse ! " said Fanny.

" That's a sin ! " said Breedh.

Seumas Darcy said nothing, but there was a look of approval in his eyes. They were silent again and all four of them felt further from gladness now than they had been at setting forth in the morning. They went out quietly upon the road and down to their homes feeling small and fearful between the great shadows of the land. The land, somehow, and the things which would spring from it so unaccountably made what might reduce them to sadness always, as it brought their fathers to gloom when they thought over it darkly in the lonesome evenings with their short, black pipes between their teeth, and old Andy Giveney to the very brink of hell when the remembrance of it would lash every side of his mind as it hurried blasphemously down many a bye-way of his memorising. . . .

A strange flow of thought seemed to be coming out from the land now and into their minds, making them almost crabbed and oldish as they went on in silence. There should be nothing but gladness in their minds still, even in spite of what had happened, but they were thinking, thinking now so long before their time. . . . Soon they must be passing into the life of the land to be swallowed up forever in the living grave of the clay. These days and their schooldays could not last a great while longer. And the land was already spoiling what joy they might ever have even while they were still young. . . .

CHAPTER II

They were all well scolded when they reached home. They had spent the day idling and had nothing to show for it, not even a few crabs which might have helped to give some point to the usual evening turn of the conversation their fathers would be having with one another and with Andy Giveney. They would feel themselves shrivelling into smaller compass as they realised almost tearfully what useless little brats they were before the looks of their fathers at them out of angry eyes. . . . They were yet too weak and weeshy to help in the fields, but boots and clothes had to be bought for them so that they might be sent to school and catechism until they were confirmed and a bit had to be put into their mouths. Then some sort of a future had, in one way or another, to be made for all of them out of the bit of land. Little things like a successful expedition to the forbidden crab-tree orchard had a way of mirroring feelings of their elders and of bringing pleasure in the bit of talk that it would bring. They could almost fancy the conversation that they had not succeeded in causing.

" Damn it now, aren't they the courageous little ruffians entirely ? It's mebbe shooting some of the murdering gang they'll be yet."

" And getting hung for it, begad ! "

" Begad aye ! "

The exultation of the men, if they could have even caused it, would always succeed in overshadowing the small annoyance of the women in being left without their help by the boldness of their daughters in " running away off from them on Saturday when there

was ironing to be done and an extra pig's pot to be boiled." For Sunday was a day of even more than rest and adoration in Dheel when no one ever did anything after coming from Mass only spend the rest of the day talking.

At the end of this long boreen of thought we stop to think for a moment, before turning again, of the four families of Dheel from whom the children came. The Darcys, the Moyleses, the Growneys, and the Soraghans. They were all people whose lives were firmly rooted in the land, whose hopes and thoughts and dreams held inevitably the colour and quality of the land. By day their minds were never wholly active, but curiously contemplative always, within the shadows of the land. They grew halt of mind, and halt of speech, and heavy of bodily movement because the little suppleness of limb and ecstacy of heart which was so gladly theirs in their very young youth had again been absorbed back into the land. Their every thought was sped by an agrarian rage, a clayey hope, or an agricultural dream. In them the heroic spirit of the Gael had been degraded down to hold its highest expression as a tradition in the shooting of a tyrant of the land from behind a hedge. By night their sleep was dreamless, holding no sense of travelling far upon the ghostly winds towards splendid places, their immortal souls to make wild singing over the land. Even on Sundays their worship of their God was merely a passive interlude, full of distractions, in their everlasting discussion of cattle and the crops.

"How is turnips doing with you the year," a man would say to another as they drew up the laneway of God.

"Only middling. The little devil of a fly ketched me again this year."

Then they would pass into His House. And just immediately after they had put on their hats upon coming out :

" ' Here,' says he, putting out the hand. ' I won't break your word. I'll give you the nine pound ten.'

" ' Well, you can go to blazes now,' says I. ' Yourself and your nine pound ten. Wasn't that giving him his answer ? ' "

On summer mornings as they went the road down the valley and up through the pleasant hills how could they be thinking of anything else but the land that had put " the bit of condition " on the few cattle and sheep now walking on the road before them as doggedly as they. . . . When they sat by their fires in the long winter evenings their minds were still on the land. It was as an old, well-thumbed book that they would be forever reading haltingly by the sad, quiet glow of the turf fire. It was the flickering light of the poor dream of it rather than that of the fire of half-wet turf that warmed their hearts and brought the light of comfort into their eyes.

Their very children had been formed surrounded by all these shadows of pre-natal influence in the greatly laboured womb of the land. Thus were they warped by it to struggle howling into its life, shaped in body and in mind by the immense brutality that it was. It was true, of course, that one or two of every family springing up here made escape to the cities to become shop-boys or shop-girls, or else went to America to turn into none could ever tell what grand thing it might be; and when these came back over-dressed and looking prosperous they were looked at almost askance by those who had remained nearer the clay. It seemed somehow that they were not real people. Although they might have greater possessions than those who looked at them distrustfully out of shrewd eyes they were without the little patch of land which might have given them a definite existence in their native conception of attainment.

There were others, too, who made themselves queer aliens by travelling even a short way into the very

foreign country of the mind. It was a tale well worn with wonder in Dheel of how one such strange character had written verses for a weekly paper and of how another had written a book upon the history of the Midlands. Their names were often recounted in the local paper and the fame to which they had won. Very mad idiots surely these appeared to the men who peered out narrowly from the land. . . . Fame indeed! Fame begad!

But no renunciation of the land had ever happened in the families of the Moyleses, the Darcys, the Growneys, or the Soraghans. Somehow or another, every one of their breed had managed to remain attached to the land. True, some of them had wandered away from Dheel, but only to get land in other places, to marry into land, or to buy land. One of them, a Growney, had gone very far indeed in quest of land, and had been given a ranch by the American Government in Lower California. "Thousands of acres of good, kind land he has, I'm told," a man of this place would often say to another as he clicked his tongue in envy to another who would ejaculate "Begad! Begad!" in disbelief of the wonder.

The Moyleses had the name on them of being a curious clan. Old Martin Moyles, the grandfather of young Oliver, still lived, but the life was only just crosswise in him, as they said, for he was dying of cancer, yet as he sat there howling with pain his thoughts ran altogether upon the land, a bit of land out of which he had been tricked in the days gone by:

"Me land, me land! The curse of Cromwell on them that done me out of me lovely land!"

And, strangely enough, the grabber who had desolated him in this case was not Colonel Montagu Marlay or any of that accursed breed, but one of his own nationality and religion, and, further, one of his own family. His son, James, had spent a goodly portion of his manhood in looking out for the best match he could get, a match

which might have the effect of rooting him more deeply and affectionately, not in life, but in the land. At long last he had struck upon Julia Bray, for she had a fortune that was in keeping with the reputation of her brother Colum, who was accounted a rising man or a spreading man, which was a more apt description of him seeing that he was acquiring more land from year to year in many a way. He had, indeed, progressed very well, for he was subtle, far-seeing, shrewd, and promised finely to accomplish the thick leggings and the thick mind of a County Meath grazier.

Now, there was a certain farm which had been owned by old Ambrose Moyles, the brother of Martin, and from which he had been evicted by the Marlays. It stood somewhat detached from the remainder of the estate of Dheel, and this may have been one of the reasons why Colonel Marlay had taken the notion of selling it. The heart of old Martin Moyles beat high with delight when the news came to him that there was, after all the years, a hope of getting back his brother's land. . . . But he had not enough money, while there was the land so sweet before his eye. He began to urge his son to marry Julia Bray, for with the fortune she would have to bring into the house he might be able to contrive with this money and his own and a bit of standing in with the bank to get back the rich, beautiful fields of his brother Ambrose. However, in the ill-luck of things, when it came to the sale by private treaty, they found out that Marlay's agent, Henry Fitzgibbon Smith, the solicitor, was asking about twice as much as they were able to give. It was a bitter blow to think of the land going from him and he so near his end. . . . The grand fields would be mirrored, out of his mind all bright with the only beauty that his soul had known, in the little, red fire under the pig's pot as he sat there wild with the rage of his pain all day and every day. The hope of regaining the lost fields had been kept a

shining secret between father and son, an inspiration of the family, like some holy relic that had been handed down, but now it forced itself upon them that they must let a third party into the know, and this was above all people big Colum Bray, the brother of Julia. He had his eye on the farm, too, but the Moyleses had a kind of rightful stake in it, that he said, with a shrewd flicker of his left eyelid, he did not like to interfere with. They mightn't mind so much now, of course, or have any damnable suspicions of him, when he was going to be a kind of connection of theirs. He was, to all decent seeming, as anxious for the marriage of Julia into the Moyleses as any brother could well be. But if he " planked down " the money it must be share and share alike between him and them in the grand place, the sweet, kindly upland farm out of which Ambrose Moyles had been thrown on to the road. . . . He was as eager as a young colt on the first whimper of the arrangement, and at once big and significant as soon as he had said his say. Old Martin snarled and cursed a sight more than was good for any Christian man when he saw himself forced by circumstances to accept this compromise between getting back the whole of the land and losing the whole of it for ever. Yet was it fully as hard to see this bit of the lovely land cut away as if his leg or his arm had been taken off even to save his body.

" But sure what difference does it make, anyhow ? " argued Colum. " Sure, we're all one now, as you may say, and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll buy the whole thing in a lump like and then I'll hand yous over your half." A certain dalliance upon the part of Henry Fitzgibbon Smith was contrived almost as a dramatic expedient to enforce a decision favourable to Colum.

" Right y'are, me gosoon ! " said old Martin Moyles to Colum Bray when he could bear no longer the strain of further separation from the beloved land.

In the same week in which James married Julia Colum Bray purchased that portion of the lands of Dheel which had formerly been in the possession of Ambrose Moyles. Old Martin almost gurgled in childish expectation of delight as he sat by the fire waiting for Colum to come into the house to tell him of the deed. But Colum did not come, for an amazing thing happened of a sudden to defeat the old man's dream, and with an appearance upon it that was quite natural, this bit of black treachery sprang out of the very land of which he had been so brightly dreaming. . . . But the everlasting hunger for the sweet, lovely fields had ached so strongly all the while in the heart of Colum Bray that his word of honour passed out of him as a thing on the wind, a bit of foolishness. Wouldn't any man be a proper idiot to part with that fine place and he having it in his own hands ? Hah ! sure he wasn't connected into the Moyleses, and what was marriage anyway ? He sent them word of his intention. He was going to keep the whole place himself. He was after paying for it, and so it was his own. . . . The desolation of his hope was nearly the death of old Martin. It turned him at one blast almost into a raging lunatic. To see that gorgeous, most beautiful piece of land he had been dreaming of all his life grabbed and gone from him by a trick that was after being manœuvred by one connected with him, as you might say, through the sacred bonds of matrimony itself. It made him howl with greater anguish when he thought of this thing that had been done to him just as a final blow out of all the bitterness of the land before he went down to the grave. . . .

As time went on and as his mind passed out of the blind rage of vexation his wrath became deliberate and devilish, lashing itself as it fell constantly upon the parties to the marriage through which he had been swindled out of his brother's land. In particular did it fall heavily upon his son's wife, Julia Bray.

" Julyeen Bray, ye grabber's devil of a sister ! " he would hiss at her a thousand times a day as she moved about the fire doing the cooking for the men or the pigs.

As the months wore into more than a year he became more subtle and villainous in his rage. A child had come to his son, this Oliver of the present, and long before the little thing was able even to " take notice " he would look down at it in the cradle and say, nodding in the direction of the mother : " Who's that ? " But not even the smile of the baby would soften the bitterness of his reply to his own question. " That's the grabber's sister so it is. You're the grabber's breed avic, though your grandfather and all belonging to him was decent men. D'ye hear that avic ? Your father is a grabbed and a ruined man and you'll never be anything. Nothing, nothing, for we'll never get back our land ! " And thus, the very soul of him enveloped in this wild rage, old Martin Moyles rode his way down to the grave

There was another fierce story in the family of the Growneys. It was the grandfather of little Breedh who had shot the Honourable Gustavus Rochfort Marlay at the hill of the White Lady, or as it was ever afterwards known, " Marlay's Hill," shot him dead as he drove proudly from the attorney's in Ballyscurlock with the writs in his pocket for the eviction of more of the people of Dheel. The story went that the horse had galloped home to the Mansion with the dead man sitting up there straight and stiff in the moonlight. . . . When the English lord's magnificent daughter, who was the wife of the Honourable Gustavus Rochford Marlay came out to greet her husband it was his corpse that she saw with all the devil gone out of it and it ready for the grave. . . . The Growney who had done the deed and so won an honoured place in the history of Dheel had escaped to the States and died there a year or two later. But, hidden in the house yet, was the old bell-

mouthed gun that had done good work in leaving one tyrant low. Breedh's mother had often shown it to her, saying with great pride as the fearsome thing was exposed :

" There's the gun ! He was a noble gosoon that pulled the trigger. May the Light of Heaven shine upon him this night ! " Even thus were the great shadows of the land induced into the minds of even the little girls. There were frequent moments too when heavy shadows seemed to stretch and fall from out the land, filling all the house for a long time and remaining as dark clouds between their parents and between them. . . . Often in the long, silent nights of winter their mother would begin to sigh and their father would then put on a scowl as he sat, sunk down in gloom, upon the other side of the fire. . . . They would begin to cry then as if in the presence of some monstrous thing which made them fearful, but which they could not understand. . . . Then a kind of desolate whimper made up of sighs and sobs and passionate murmurings would rise all around the house as if they were already making mourning for their defeat at the hands of the ghastly power that had just made itself of such grim significance in their lives.

The most beautiful girls who had ever sprung from this place had never been able to escape fully from the remembrance of those dark moments in which they had felt so very fond of their mothers. Not even when their beauty had been at the noontide of its bloom, nor when they viewed it sadly reflected in some mirror in the dusk just before they hailed it greatly for the last time and said farewell, and then went with it a solitary mourner on its way back into the land. . . . .

The shadow of the land was heavy also over the young lives of Seumas Darcy and Fanny Soraghan. The holdings of their fathers were something smaller than even those of the Moyleses and the Growneys, and

so continually was the land of even more sinister significance in their lives. They were a younger brother and sister of their respective long and ragged families, and very soon they would have to be moving out into the world to shift for themselves. It was because of this, maybe, that they were thrown together in a kind of subconscious sympathy while their young years remained with them still. The land was already gathering the others to itself, but them it was beginning to force away. Yet after such a fashion as might make them intensely to feel its power. . . . Very soon either of them must be going to America or else into one of the shops of Ballyscurlock, for these were the places of exile, the alien climes which claimed those who went away from the land.

If they went to America they would have to be scraping and slaving to send home the bit of money that might assist their people in their endless effort to make some encroachment upon the land. If they only went over the hill and into Ballyscurlock or Garradrimna or any of the villages, they would have effected no real escape from the land. They would be stuck in it still, knowing all its meanest torments, while remaining removed for ever, it would seem, from the poor joys it might bring. The immense labour of a fair day, the lonely company of the accustomed evening drunkards. The woes of the wives who came to buy the things for the week, saving a little, maybe, from the thirst of their husbands or the hunger of their children to buy a bit of finery that might remind them half sadly of the beauty that was once theirs, when they were girls and still clean and young. . . .

Sometimes out of these circumstances would be shaped the full tragedy of a life perfectly complete in itself and almost a fine story. Yet the structure of such a story shaped itself almost easily around many a girl of the fields.

. . . . . .

She lived with her mother in a little cottage on a road which seemed to lead to all the lonely places behind the fields. Her life was so quiet here with the old woman, for she was the one member of the family who had not gone away. Their lives were hidden from the lives around them. On Sunday mornings only the two of them would be seen together passing down the road to Mass in Garradrimna, a continuous hum of confidence flowing low between them, for there is much that one woman may talk of to another anywhere and always. It might be that their lives were not so well hidden after all. It appeared even to those who saw them like this as if they must be remembering the " clutch " that had fluttered wildly away from the old woman upon young wings, and that in their eyes, through a mist of fondness, all the way down to the chapel were the faces of the others, the young bright faces of Micus and Shameen and Nora and Jane. . . . In the very walk of her would appear some gesture of the greater love that had caused Martha to remain living here in this cold, poor place, the mother's daughter, as they called her, and the last of the " clutch."

It seemed so many years now since the last of the others had drifted out from this tideless place upon the waves of the world. Then the man himself had died, and now of all the family were left only these two, the mother and the daughter, in this quiet place. The years for them were very long and lonely. The mind of Martha had grown old through continuous, sad association with the mind of her mother in this prison of remembrance where they were always waiting, waiting for the end of remembrance to come. . . . The only tidings of the wanderers were letters which never held any real gladness. They would tell of such a thing as Death, of how, for instance, Shameen, the second eldest, had met with a shocking end in an explosion at Galveston in Texas.

" The wilds of Texas, the wilds of Texas, to think of poor, unfortunate Shameen dead out there in the wilds of Texas ! "

It had seemed to Martha at one time that she must be hearing this word of mourning from the old woman forever, that she must be watching her rocking herself to and fro over her sorrow until all her days should end. . . . A year later came a letter from Boston with a full account and a photograph to show that Micus had married a most beautiful girl out there. . . . To the old woman they looked a grand pair surely in the photograph, her own little Micus and the grand girl he had won. . . . But she had lost him, and the little bits of money that had come to her in the American letters might never come again, for had not Micus a woman of his own now who was lovely and young. . . . She could not forgive this comely, smiling stranger for winning Micus away from his own mother, and a subtle enmity stirred in her as she gazed long upon the likeness of the couple standing so proudly there. . . . Later, when she showed the picture of Micus and his wife to the neighbours she tried her best to appear very pleased about the marriage, although her look of enjoyment was contrived so very near the sobbing of her heart. . . .

It was of Micus's woman she would be thinking until news came over from Liverpool that little Nora had married, too, but there was no photograph with the letter to tell of any splendid entry into a fine way of living, although in this case she required some such proof for exhibition to the neighbours more than in that of Micus. It was different, somehow, with a daughter, and her voice must have been filled with the ring of pure gladness as she gave out the news. . . . But no expensive likeness came at all, although she got Martha to write for one, and when it did not come even then she knew that Nora had only married some poor man, some man like the one she had called

"himself" with little pride through all the years of their married life, and who was dead. . , .

As the darkest shadow fell the word that Jane had married a red soldier belonging to England and gone off with him to some heathen land.

Oh, Mother of God ! Wasn't it a hard world surely ? This lonely cottage and a poor, mean life with her brood gone from her all but one. But it was well indeed that there remained the great comfort of Martha.

Wasn't she good, now, the old woman often thought, not to want to leave her mother, and she a fine, comely girl that would be making a great future for herself anywhere at all ? There was little for any girl around Garradrimna excepting the drudgery of a marriage that would be made for her, but, although she had never said a word against marriage to Martha, Martha had said out of her own thought :

" Now, there's enough of us after getting married and the like, and I'm not going to leave you, so I'm not."

" You're a good girl, Martha, a good, industrious, devoted girl."

" It wouldn't be either right or lucky for me to leave you and you having no one now only myself."

And with these words had Martha Kiely entered that beautiful sisterhood in Ireland, the girls who do not leave their mothers, but remain to grow old in attendance upon the old women. There were the two of them to be supported by her labour, so she endeavoured to do the best that she could, and went to work in the house of Aloysius Daly, who had the biggest shop in Garradrimna.

It was not very long until she had made herself a favourite with the customers, with even the old women and the long-married women, who confided in her all their intimate woes and wasted many hours of her day. In the evenings the public bar of this many-sided establishment would be crowded with the uncouth

swains who came here to admire her. Above their pints and behind their clay pipes their eyes were always upon her from out their dark, lugubrious faces all dirty with beard. . . . Aloysius Daly had already found her an essential aid to his growing business, and used to speak kindly to her and well of her behind her back. . . . In lapses of the work through the day and through the evenings little bits of dreams would come dancing into her mind. . . . Some of the elderly women had already advised her and some of the young men had already spoken of marriage. . . . But she went about her work unmindful of their promptings. There was her mother with this and these were all. There was little gladness in it surely, the long, hard day in the shop, and then the weary walk home to the little, quiet cottage in the evenings beneath the changing skies of all the year, loneliness of winter, loneliness of summer, and her old mother seemingly so lifeless there by the poor fire of sticks when she came in. The old woman had grown more crochetty and cranky with age and with longings which would not end, and was poor company on any evening for a girl still young and fair. Yet none of those who passed the cottage in the night-time had thought, however flickering, of the mysterious tenderness that enfolded the loving pair within.

"Musha, the Lord save us, but isn't your poor mother living an awful long time."

All kinds of people had begun to say this to her with increasing frequency as she would be attending them in the shop, and even Aloysius himself, the bloated gombeen-man, would often drop an observation slily as he looked at her out of his slits of eyes. . . . She had been so many years here now without any change at all coming upon her way of life. . . . Something was happening to her which she had scarcely thought of all the time. . . . The constant company of her old mother only, year in and year out, had sapped youth

out of her, and now was it causing her comeliness to fade. . . . She seemed to feel that they were all saying how she was no longer the girl she used to be, and a change had fallen upon those who came to Aloysius Daly's. One by one the old women had disappeared, their places being taken by the long-married women. Now also some of the girls who had found husbands for themselves about the time she came here were a long time married. Many of the men, too, who had whispered to her of marriage were married to other girls, and the younger men who replaced them looked at her with no light in their eyes.

It was queer how she had not sooner felt the full meaning of it all. Her great love for her old mother had blinded her to all the gradual movement of change about her and in herself, but Aloysius Daly, whose keenness permitted nothing to pass had noticed it, and more keenly in the dwindling of the evening topers, his most profitable customers.

One morning his eye was heavy upon her as he came into the shop. He began to lead up to the point by dropping hints which were not very vague. . . . All the other publicans of Garradrimna, for instance, had changed their barmaids. McDermott and Clinton and Brannagan and Higgins, and he was more than sorry, so he was, to feel himself now forced to do the same. But of course he had his childher to think of. . . .

That evening as she remained on until the closing time of her last day in this place she felt immensely lonely. . . . The lost opportunities of all the vanished years came surging up about her face and eyes, a dark sea. The rumour of her disappearance from Daly's was already abroad, and some of the men who had whispered o her and some of the women who had advised her were all crowding in to hurry her mind still further into sad remembrance. . . .

The long road home seemed very dark although the

stars were dancing in the sky. . . . She was unable to speak the usual evening greeting to the old woman as she took her seat by the other side of the fire of sticks. It seemed the very saddest thing that her life had moved down so inevitably into this lonely, lonely ending. Her life and all she might have made of it was falling far away from her eyes now as a bit of a dream that is past falls away from one's mind in the morning. But there was still a tremendous reality in the cough that came from the shivering spectre of a woman upon the other stool. . . . She had only a very few pounds saved from all the years of her labour in Aloysius Daly's, and she had no daughter even as that old thing had a daughter still. . . . Yet, sure, she was the last of the "clutch," and already was she again thanking God and His Blessed Mother that the old woman was still alive.

. . . . . .

These children now seemed to be slipping inevitably towards such destinies, but there was always the promise of life to break the darkest as well as the brightest plan.

CHAPTER III

Very soon Oliver Moyles was passing into the poor adventure of the land. He was to be seen now, his young, lithe limbs being made halt and awkward by the continuous pull of the clay upon them, and his figure being made still more ungainly by the hang about it of last year's clothes, already growing too small for him. . . . The little breeches tugged uncomfortably at his knees, and the sleeves of his jacket pulled far up his arms showed his wrists still thin and sinewless. . . . His eyes would be always watery with distress as he drew loads along the April roads. . . . And Breedh, too, was beginning to pass into girlhood. She had already departed out of her custom of walking home the road from Mass with children, but would walk instead with the grown girls and married women. She was already grown " old-fashioned " in her thoughts from listening to them talking about the price of eggs and chickens, or of such and such a woman's illness, a prevalent topic which would always bring the conversation to concealment from her in whispers and shakes of the head.

Often Oliver would hear the men he would be working with in the fields say as Breedh passed the road :

" She's getting to be a fine cut of a lassie, isn't she ? "

" A fine, stout lump."

" She'll be soon throwing her eye at the lads."

" Aye, begad."

Oliver would be often strangely prompted by such talk to run to the hedge and look after Breedh as she went far down the road. . . . And when they might meet face to face now it was a great shyness that would

be upon them and not the old, fine, free friendship of their childhood at all. . . .

The little fields where they worked held such narrow and relentless purpose for the men. For the time being these were all that the world meant to them, the little fields. It was a continuous fight against the world for sake of their little fields, a dark, lonely battle in which even God Almighty sometimes seemed to put Himself on the side of the world, with a late spring or a fall of the blight upon the potatoes, or a wet harvest leaving the hay and oats rotting before their eyes. But there were times when the young mind of Oliver would be raised into a wandering wonder high above the mean circumstances of the battle. He would lift his eyes from his task and his look would fall up against the side of the hills beyond which lay Ballyscurlock and Garradrimna and Castleconnor and Mullaghowen, but somehow his thought could never go beyond the hills. . . . He knew all the people, in some way or another, however slight, however intimate, who lived within these limits of distance. Boys and girls out of some of the houses had gone to school with him. He had heard his father speak the names of others in connection with dealings at fairs. The people of some of the houses were distant relations. The lives of all of them held some aspect of alliance with the lives of his people and with his life, which was the life of the land. . . . Yet often would come to him the thought that there were other people and another world beyond those of this place which he knew so well. Brighter fields, maybe, and kindlier roads, and girls whom he might look at and fill his eyes with the looks of them. . . . And his thought would keep calling to his heart down many a comely byeway, of what might be beyond the hills, uncoloured by the life he knew, fragrant September roads which would be like white silk ribands in the soft moonlight, and his thoughts, too, all full of light as

they went wandering far above him through a crowd of soft, shedding, kindly stars. . . . It would not be night at all, but around his consciousness only a bewitching magic flowing in to inveigle his mind towards a beauty that was pensive, full of sad twilight things, fading in such great, still, quiet into a rich, velvet night through which strange lovely birds might call to him alone as they flew down to lonely places. . . . The thing that was not of dreaming, which he could but dumbly feel and towards no fine expression—the sweet sincerity of harvest, that blessed giving, the rich birth where two great lovers, the land and summer, had lain through days of sleep and nights of kissing, and born from it into a very lordship of its life, to be the figure of an Iliad when the reaping came. . . .

A loud curse like an ugly knife-gash across his thoughts of beauty would always recall him to reality from the things he could express out of their lofty rapture but poorly to his own mind, and those others, the more subtle and eternal, which his soul, already beginning to be made dumb by the land, might never hope to say with any eloquence to his heart. . . .

" The curse of hell on you, you young idiot, what the damnation d'ye mane by standing there looking round you like a lunatic and the mare's winkers hanging off her and the reins down round her legs ! "

And in the evenings old crabbed fellows foregathering around him, no matter where he went, to talk about the land, when his mind might be all upon a turn of Breedh's hair where he had seen it blown away from her white neck on some sunny, windy day. . . .

" Begorras, it was a great price ! "

" Now, did ye ever hear the peel of it for an acre of mangels ? "

" And they only the manes of making you give the ground the good dunging that it wanted."

" Begorras, aye ! "

And then a big, unanimous "Hah!" of jubilation to express their satisfaction that one of themselves had succeeded in beating the forces that were always so near to swoop down somehow, and rob a man of the just reward of his sweat and labour. . . .

But always before the eyes of Oliver there would be the vision of Breedh, her hair all lovely in the wind and sun. . . . Very soon her hair must be seen in the neat plait of her rich maidenhood. And he knew that it must shine, too, like a rope of gold, a great richness tossing proudly from her shapely shoulders as she walked in wonder before his eyes. . . .

Yet to youth the years are always so long, especially here, where there was nothing ever to break the weariness of day falling down heavily upon day. Occasionally there would be a hurling or football match or sports in summer, all of which stood for little breaks like flashes of light across the weary sameness, but for the most part there was nothing at all, but just one week passing darkly over another until the year was gone. It was pleasant, of course, to go to the little gatherings where the influx of strangers from all the towns beyond the hills would help for the time to create the illusion of some new, other life. And in the presence of such, with this power of theirs, those who were doomed to spend their lives within the circle of the hills would feel their minds always roaming out affectionately in the adventure of a dream. . . . Moving shyly and separately whenever Oliver or Breedh would catch the eyes of one another it would appear to each that the other was of a sudden grown finer. It would be a different world then to each for such a glorious little while. . . .

Oliver would hang with a certain fondness upon the outskirts of the crowds listening, with a certain gladness, to the talk of the better paid shop-boys who came from the towns because it was not eternally of the land. . . .

It was of horses and championship matches and athletics and girls. . . . Breedh, moving in an outer circle with other girls of her age, liked the look of these young men. She would hang her head shyly when one of them would suddenly turn aside to look at her, his countenance bending sideways as he performed his smile. Somehow she thought of different things when she thought of them. . . . But somehow Oliver always flashed across her vision just then, and she would be immediately sorry for the little, wayward turn of her thought. . . . But sure it was only natural her mind, would say to her, and wasn't she seeing Oliver always ? . . . He was as a part of the very colour which enfolded her life, aye, more than enfolded, crushed it in upon herself and her comeliness from week's end to week's end. . . .

And soon all this vague shaping of impulse in their minds was breaking into reality. . . . In each it turned ever towards the intense selfishness of youth, as if to avert for a moment the fall of darkness upon their years, and in the light of this moment it would gladly appear to them that the things they could do in the world might prevent forever their final absorption by the land. Oliver's consuming ambition at length grew to be an endeavour to contrive his appearance into resemblance of that of the fellows he had seen at the sports or the games. He pestered his people until they bought him a new suit of clothes which included long trousers. With a few shillings he had managed to scrape together somehow or another he bought a big, brass watch from a peddling Jewman, and hung out of it across his breast an old chain, which he had found while working in the fields. He made a shining quiff in his hair with vaseline and wore his tweed cap far back on his head to exhibit his resplendent forelock when he moved abroad from the house on Sundays, already a man in his own mind. . . .

About this time, too, Breedh took to wearing a long skirt and putting her hair into the plaits which he had already seen so lovely to the fancy of his mind. . . . There was such a sudden assumption of womanhood in her walk, too, the sinuous, graceful carriage of her figure making him, in its movement before his eyes, feel more glad to be alive amid the clay of the fields. The colour of her new blouse, made so alluring in its curves about her soft and shapely bosom, would remain a long while in his consciousness after he had seen her pass, making a kind of veil of fondness through which he viewed the distant hills. . . . There were hours now which to all seeming were stolen from the life around them, hours in little houses where a dance would be happening amid the boreens of Dheel. The sound of a tin whistle or a fiddle or a flute would call to their young feet as they went the road. . . . And when Oliver would go into any of these houses to which, after a fashion, they were both forbidden by their people to go, taking off his cap shyly as he went in the door and putting on a broad smile, Breedh would be almost certain to be there before him, turning away as he came in with a great show of interest suddenly developed in the talk of the girls around her, giggling between moments of talk about new hats and the like, or about two lovely shop-boys from Castleconnor they had just seen passing the road most grandly dressed. . . . And if Oliver came first Breedh would be almost certain to appear not very long behind. She would come in, not shyly at all, but very proudly in a blaze of sunlit laughter, not noticing Oliver at all as he stood there blushing, with his back to the table or the dresser or sitting up on the settle-bed looking very foolish indeed when she appeared, and twisting and untwisting his cap when he was not using it to rub the perspiration of confusion off his face. . . . Somehow they would not seem to see one another for a great while. . . .

The dancing of the sets would be going on. Up and down and across the narrow, tiled floor of the room the couples would be passing to and fro. The red ashes from the fire would sometimes commingle, a reality of earth, with the whirling ecstacy of the dance, but in these fleeting instants of this poor place there would be celebrated the shining moment of ecstacy and joy. It would be as a rich glow of beauty and godliness upon each face, and, although the golden Irish day might have begun soon to flow into darkness across the fields and over the hills, the world of Dheel would be lit all brightly as with a light divine. It would not be long until Oliver would be meeting Breedh in the dance, asking her out upon the floor, or else feeling his arm around her waist or her hand in his, as they passed through the mazy figures of the " sets." But here their shyness was upon them still, yet, maybe, with a great joy keeping it company, but it was strange that they would look almost in bitter anger at one another in moments of the dance, and what could be between them now only the noble anger of love. . . . Yet no love words would fall, no murmurous lyric whisperings, no talk of kisses in the dusk. And they would grow so quiet, too, while they waited between the dances, as if their minds had been lifted very far beyond the immediate scene to a proud place of dwelling which could not house this small delight. . . . But there would be the man of the house and herself, too, his wife, pulled out upon the floor by the sound of the music and the joy that had come dancing back into their hearts. In the pleasure of observing the enjoyment of " youth," as they called the whole business of the dance, they were once more as a courting pair and must dance again. And, so wonderful is joy, in the moment of their translation their years would fall from them, a great gap would have been cut of a sudden through the darkness that had shadowed all their lives within the

shadow of the land, and it was wonderful to see how coy herself would grow of a sudden, all smiles and shyness as she looked up at himself, who would look down all gallantly just before he took her in his arms to whirl round and round. . . .

And there in the corner would be Willie Doolan, who might almost be regarded as the wizard of these scenes, the man who made the music. Willie Doolan was already an old man, but in spite of gray hairs his face looked young. He had retained his youth through association with the little dances in Dheel as well as those of the whole countryside. Wherever a dance would be there was found Willie. It would matter not in the least how secretly the word of it had been kept he was certain to have heard of it. He was known to have often walked twenty miles of a Sunday with his fiddle under his arm just that he might put in an appearance at a dance. In the winter it might almost be said that he lived from dance to dance, and for long periods he would migrate from Dheel to go into the almost unknown country beyond Castleconnor and Mullaghowen. And in those far places, as in this, the first word to the newcomer at the door, a whispered earnest of enjoyment, would be :

" Willie Doolan is here ! "

The musician himself always remained with his face turned away from the dance as he drew the glad sounds out of his fiddle. His whole soul would seem to be absorbed in the ecstacy which he made, for this was his life and his hope and his dream as well as his only possession in the world—to be making music for the dances. . . . All this, and just one other power, he was the life's torment of Andy Giveney. The man who spoke only out of the gloom of the land could not bear to go near this other, the man of joy into whose soul a thought of the land had never entered.

" No, no, I won't gwin there now for I'd feel a kind

of weakness, don't you know, and I standing in the presence of the slobbering idiot, himself and his fiddle, a kind of an immoral pesht that does be always only making the young lads forget the bloody fineness of them that went before them."

But Willie Doolan would never say a thing like this when he would be invited into any little house of Dheel to strike up a bit of a dance, even although he had been told that Andy Giveney was in there before him sitting at the fire, and he striving to tell his stories to the young lads. . . . Willie would march in proudly, strong in the knowledge that the crabbed old ruffian would drift out sullen and defeated with the first whimper of the music.

There were moments when there fell a spell of weariness upon the dance, when the summit of ecstacy would seem to have been reached and passed on the other side. Then there would be a call for a song from some of the lads, and after a good deal of pressing one way or another the lad would begin. Leaning back his head while a kind of beatific expression would come upon his face as the long, doleful ballad would begin to flow from him, pouring blackly over the gaiety of the scene. It would be some mournful tale of love and defeat, the love of some man or woman, that had gone out in sorrow, because the sorrow of Ireland would seem to have stood for defeat always, defeat even of love. There was in particular one such woeful ballad that had won to a certain traditional popularity in this place because it more nearly approached the quality of a dirge, and so when he had been asked to oblige the company, " The Lament of Morian Shehone for Miss Mary Burke " would come into his mind as the best piece of entertainment he could think of giving them :

There's darkness in thy dwelling-place and silence reigns above ; And Mary's voice is heard no more, like the soft voice of love. Yes ! thou art gone, my Mary dear ; and Morian Shehone

Is left to sing his song of woe, and wail for thee alone.
Oh! snow-white were thy virtues—the beautiful, the young—
The old with pleasure bent to hear the music of thy tongue:
The young with rapture gazed on thee, and their hearts in love were bound,
For thou wast brighter than the sun that sheds its light around.
My soul is dark, oh! Mary dear! thy sun of beauty's set,
The sorrowful are dumb for thee—the grieved their hearts forget:
And I am left to pour my woe above thy grave alone,
For dear wert thou to the fond heart of Morian Shehone.

Fast flowing tears above the grave of the rich man are shed,
But they are dried when the cold stone shuts in his narrow bed;
Not so with hearts faithful love—the dark grave cannot hide
From Morian's eye thy form of grace, of loveliness and pride.
Thou didst not fall like the sere leaf, when Autumn's chill winds blow—
'Twas a tempest and a storm-blast that has laid my Mary low.
Hadst thou not friends that loved thee well—hadst thou not garments rare?
Wast thou not happy, Mary? Wast thou not young and fair?
Then why should the dread spoiler come, my heart peace to destroy,
Or the grim tyrant tear from me my all of earthly joy?
Oh! am I left to pour my woes above thy grave alone?
Thou idol of the faithful heart of Morian Shehone!

Sweet were thy looks and sweet thy smiles and kind wast thou to all:
The withering scowl of envy on thy fortunes dared not fall;
For thee thy friends lament and mourn, and never cease to weep;
Oh, that their lamentations could awake thee from thy sleep.
Oh, that thy peerless form again could meet my loving clasp,
Oh, that the cold, damp hand of Death could loose his iron grasp!
Yet when the valley's daughters meet beneath the tall elm tree,
And talk of Mary as a dream that never more shall be;
Then may thy spirit float around, like music in the air,
And pour upon their virgin souls a blessing and a prayer.
Oh! am I left to pour my wail above thy grave alone,
Thus sinks in silence the lament of Morian Shehone!

The lad's eyes would never open as he poured the ballad from him, his expression growing only more beatific the while. At the end there would be a sudden, loud burst of applause, but no word of comment nor of approbation, no sound at all after the applause but the preparatory scraping of Willie Doolan's fiddle, and after just one last heavy moment hanging suspended

over the scene, but not to fall, a brave, wild leaping into joy again on the middle of the floor. . . .

But the ending of the merry evening always came so soon, for these dances were, after all, only, little stolen moments for those who were still as young as Oliver and Breedh, and whose youth forbade their presence at the regular dance-houses, although on account of the parish-priest of the united parishes of Castleconnor and Dheel, Father Peter Flanagan, who frequently spoke of them from the altar, and said they were the devil's own houses, there were not many of the kind in Dheel. From the place where the spark of joy was kept alive even thus fugitively the couples who had perhaps danced together many times in the course of the night never moved away together through the fragrant darkness up by short cuts through the dark, dew-wet fields. . . . The girls and the boys would move towards home in little, separate groups. But one great night, one lovely night after they had danced with one another almost in every dance that had taken the floor from the early evening in Cassidy's little house, Oliver and Breedh had hung upon the outskirts of groups that were moving near one another. At a dark spot under the trees near the Garradrimna road he had rushed over and caught her in his arms and kissed her warmly. In the light which hung around them in this moment he could see the open and glorious wonder of her eyes and her hair falling back from her neck in coils that were thick and golden and bright with beauty. . . .

CHAPTER IV

Already, although it seemed only such a little while since they had all been at school together and romping through the fields of evenings and to the crab-tree orchard on Saturdays, the years were already shaping definite courses for these four young people of Dheel. Fanny Soraghan was getting ready for America, and Seumas Darcy had already gone to " serve his time " in Gogarty's of Castleconnor. It seemed as if they were destined to pass a great distance away from one another, for all these calamities were phrased expressly in the codes of the fields, were shadows of the economic struggle which was always springing out from the cold, black, treacherous heart of the fields. It would be a long time, indeed, before there might be a chance of Seumas marrying Fanny. She must first go out to America, and, after such a very short while, would come to be so changed. She would soon have passed beyond the life she had known, and almost insensibly become a part of the fine, proud life of America, and even the dances and all the small joys of her young days with the other boys and girls must come to appear as things of poverty and defeat. At a " social " of some Irish society she might occasionally meet someone from the country around Dheel, and, for a little while, her thoughts would be turned back to the " old country." And Seumas all this while would be stuck in the shop in Castleconnor feeling the reality of the life whose romance had been expressed in the cheap, flashy clothes he had admired with Oliver upon the fellows at the sports. . . . The few pounds a year he might get for his job after serving his time for three long years would be barely sufficient to turn him out

in a decent suit and give him a few shillings in his pocket to do the gentleman on a Sunday. It was even thus, indeed, that he would have achieved the dream of his young youth.

He would wear his week-day clothes faster than he earned money to keep himself in Sunday clothes, for it was hard work. When not labouring for drunkards he would be carrying sacks of meal and flour to the waiting carts outside the door, or snatching a smoke on the sly in the back-yard of Gogarty's. From the very first he must feel that it was a cursed life. He would be driven to say this. It must soon lead him into mean expedients to forget the crush of it upon his mind. These would be in the way of tippling a good deal from bottles behind him on the shelves, or bringing an extra drink to a crowd in the tap-room and drinking it behind the door, or in the dark passage, and on his return bringing the empty glass amongst the other empty glasses collected with a great clatter. . . . There would be card-money to be got too, and money for many a little private debt, but, of course, there was always the till standing full and handy. . . . How else, they would often say by way of condonation in Dheel, could a shop-boy ever get enough money to buy a publichouse for himself ?

But in spite of all the hopelessness into which they might drift with the passing years it seemed, through the strength of its happening, that they would be able always to remember one night of their lives, and each, perhaps, at the very same moment, too. It was the little dance that had been held to celebrate, not exactly to celebrate so much as to mark with something akin to respect and affection, Fanny's leave-taking of the fields. There was scarcely a trace of sadness about it, but instead almost a touch of delight that a destiny so fine should have befallen one of the girls. It was a great bit of luck, surely, that her aunt in the States

had sent Fanny Soraghan her passage out as well as the price of new clothes. . . . She looked so strong and rosy, one well fit, surely, to be facing the world. And Seumas Darcy looked such a promising lad, too, although given a little too much, maybe, to looking at the girls as he tried his best to appear very gallant, with his big bob of red, curly hair sticking out in front of his cap, which he did not remove like the rest of the lads around him in going through the figures. It was, indeed, a memorable dance for many a reason. Breedh Growney and Oliver Moyles were both there, too. There was scarcely a moment through the night when the two who were both, in a way, going out to face the world did not envy the two who were remaining here to maintain what beauty of friendship had arisen between them. They were somehow jealous, although all four of them together had dreamed through their childhood of some finer life beyond the land. But almost immediately they were thinking in the hard, practical way of the land, that, after all, was not the case of Oliver and Breedh almost as hopeless as their own case? It was a fact before the known world that Breedh's people might never be able to give her sufficient money to satisfy the Moyleses, and, on the other hand, curiously enough, although it was perfectly true, the Moyleses had not sufficient land to satisfy the agrarian ambitions of the Growneys as a consequence of the notorious piece of grabbing which had caused old Martin Moyles to go down so madly to the grave, and because the Growneys were a proud family on account of the man of their clan who had murdered a tyrant for love of all the land of Dheel.

Even old Andy Giveney had ventured in and stayed, although Willie Doolan was reigning here as the man of music. But he must remain, too, by right of his inherent tradition and the power which rested with him of creating gloom. The dance held its aspect of tragedy

although it almost appeared as the sole aim of all present to hide this by enjoyment and put it far away from their minds. Andy almost felt it as his duty by virtue of his power to bring the whole into abysmal harmony with the dark vision of the land which continually coloured his mind. Like Willie Doolan, although in a far different way of ecstasy, he had prolonged his youth. So here he was now perched owlishly upon a high chair in a dark corner taking his treat and smoking and spitting and hitting the floor with his crooky stick by way of emphasis and enjoyment as he told, with as much mournfulness as he could accomplish, the pitiful story of all the families of Dheel he had seen going out upon the waves of the world. He always emphasised "the waves of the world" most gruesomely as if it sounded the note of some immense doom like a verse from Ezekiel or Jeremiah. And his bemoaning led him into many a long byeway of reminiscence until eventually everybody in the scene of enjoyment was involved. His account might easily seem rambling and irrelevant, but it was most subtly inclusive, a kind of epic which fully expressed all the meaning of the life of Dheel. It did not fail in its effect by leaving out the meanest detail. The most distant circumstance of ancestry was made poignantly intimate by facts which the talk of Andy caused to jump out of the life of Dheel only to bite back deeply into that life again. He knew every single little fact that had gone to determine and embody the various unions which had resulted in the couples he now saw before him enjoying themselves on the floor. And some of these facts were remarkably curious. They made him turn his tongue around the words maliciously as he recounted the stories. He would peer quizzically at those of whose breed he might be talking at any particular moment, and the others would nod and wink and blink and squint and slap their knees in relish, and spit and gurgle out half coughs, half

laughs, just before they took another little sup of their drinks. . . .

There now was Eugene Gavacan, for instance! He was a rich man, looking pitifully out of place here among these small farmers' sons and penniless farmers' daughters, yet the sketch of this particular fellow's ancestry which old Andy Giveney was now telling, in the meagre intervals of the various movements of his vehement gesture, sounded almost startling of itself and almost tremendous in its appeal to the other old men. . . . His father had been one of the mad, drunken, strong farmers of Dheel who had, in a wild fit of love, they said, married the daughter of a poor struggling farmer who belonged to a ferocious clan that had broken a landlord's neck and then thrown him into a bog-hole fourteen miles below Castleconnor. . . . Yes, yes. . . . The life he led her had left the poor woman only fit for the asylum in Mullaghowen about the time that this Eugene Gavacan had been born. . . . Aye, begad. . . .

Eugene since he had come to manhood had been showing flashes of both his parents in the way he would be carrying on. In his liking for the sport of the dances, his certain fondness for drink already, and in the mad fits of liking for certain girls in the course of which he would do the most unaccountable things, he betrayed a quality which made people say continually that he was his father's son. . . . Oh, he's the father's son, and where's the use in trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear? . . . Yet this did not prevent anxious mothers and conniving fathers from regarding him as a lovely match for their handsome daughters, although his mother had died in the asylum of Mullaghowen. . . .

He was a huge hulk of a fellow, with the round, heavy body of his agricultural breeding. He was gruff, uncouth, and without any trace of cultivation or conditioning. His animal mind was darkly mirrored in his

dirty talk. At a dance he always flung his heavy feet about him dangerously. . . . Just now he was after descending with his whole weight upon Breedh Growney's small, tidy foot.

" Oh, cripes ! " he said, very quietly, not by way of apology, but just as a matter of course, and continued his prance with the heavy movement of a draught horse. His big, white teeth were bared in an inane grin, and his light " chaney " blue eyes already held the look of the defective. He was enjoying himself in his own full-blooded, savage way, and although there was little about him that could be called fascinating he possessed a certain attraction in the fact that he was a good " catch " as a husband. He had a fine house and a snug farm, and was fixed definitely in contentment above the strugglers of Dheel. . . . He caught his toe in the crevice of a broken tile now and fell upon the floor, making the others laugh uproariously, and himself, too, as he rose up shaking himself, and rubbing the dust from his blue serge suit. . . . Breedh and Fanny were together at the moment, and after they had laughed with the rest they were silent for a little as each thought of the life the girl would have upon whom Eugene Gavacan might throw the final eye of allurement. . . . Somebody had begun to sing. But they did not hear, for they were listening to their own thoughts. . . . The shadows of life were already falling down about them although they were so young and fine, and here in the very middle of laughter and enjoyment. . . . Fanny had already had her chat with Seumas as they stood retired from the scene and leaning across the half-door. They had snatched kisses and spoken of remembering one another for ever between their long spells of silent gazing out where the moon was rising great and golden above the bog beyond the fields of Dheel. . . . It was the world and the fields, the hard, lonely world and the cold-hearted, merciless fields. . . .

Oliver and Breedh, after little, pleasant intervals when their minds would have been lit brilliantly by the very near presence of one another, felt that it was a less lonely thing after all to be going away. It stood at least for escape from the cruel treachery of the land. Breedh felt that maybe Oliver and she would never be able to get married, although she had just told Fanny how dying fond of him she was and he so foolish and shy and all. . . . The dance seemed to pass from the gaiety it had worn into an enjoyment that was unreal, since it was already clouded by tears. . . . Breedh felt her foot still crushed where Eugene Gavacan had stood upon it, and now the pain of it stung her to a hopeless wish that poor Oliver had only as good prospects of comfort and security before him as that rough, mad devil. The thought communicated itself to Fanny in regard to Seumas. If only this was the same in the case of Seumas she need not be going away. . . .

Poor Willie Doolan was almost exhausted from playing. It was very late in the night, nearly twelve o'clock. They were all crowding in around Fanny to bid her good-bye. . . . As the words of farewell came thronging to her ears her eyes were blinded by scalding tears. . . . Only one face still seemed to cut itself clear into her consciousness. It was the face of Andy Giveney. She saw the fierce gleam in his eyes, but there was no need to put her hands to her ears to shut out his fearful curses as of old, for other voices were calling to her out of the land from which his lamentations were flowing.

CHAPTER V

Even with the death of old Martin Moyles the rankling wound of the blow that had been dealt by the Brays to the Moyleses did not begin to heal, nor the house become any brighter into which it had brought so much torment. While the old man had remained alive there had existed, even weakly, some bond of sympathy between Oliver's father and mother, although the grabbed land always subtly induced a feeling of loss about the house as if the cow or the mare had just died. But now that the old man had been replaced in all things, all possessions and all qualities, Oliver would often hear his father nagging at his mother because of the comfort and security to which they had not yet won in the adventure of the land. . . . They blamed one another blackly, which often brought them to a savage dumbness in which each knew an agony that was worse than from the pain of any blow ; more often there arose the loud sound of blind angry words in the hearing of their only son. But in their quiet moments they had more wisdom. . . . They were thinking just as the old man must have thought, and his woman with him when she was alive, of their son now and of the fine match he might make, the marriage to some rich girl with a lovely farm of land. He was the eldest, aye, indeed, the eldest of all the children that had come so far and all that might yet come. . . . His little brothers and sisters, too, had sunk their ambitions in him, and they seemed to look to him always for a way out of their seemingly inevitable fate, the thing whose sorrow was fully signified in an event such as the parting of Fanny Soraghan and Seumas Darcy. . . . If only Oliver married a terrible rich

woman entirely with a huge farm of land. . . . The minds of all of them sprang daily towards brighter hope of what Oliver might yet do. . . . But, probably in fulfilment of the old saying about the watched pot never boiling, there was so far no sign of him doing anything. The labour of the fields was turning him coarser and more awkward daily. And besides he was going deliberately about his courtship of Breedh Growney.

Now that they had passed out of the dangerous, almost still childhood stage, they met frequently, and went home from the dances together before the whole world. . . . But, brutally, all that might have been fine and splendid as love-makng was being coloured by the lives they were forced to live, the dark, lonely lives of the land, the stern realities of the hard battle from year's end to year's end. Breedh was another constant object of hope. Her people were happy in the constant thought that her good looks might somehow win her a rich man. There were her little brothers and sisters to be thought of, and their future might not be so bright if she did not do her duty by them. Her father and mother had surely given her the beauty which was her sole possession, and she surely owed to them this return, some sacrifice of it for sake of the happiness of them. But that beggarman of an Oliver Moyles, who could never be more than a struggler like themselves, and God knows they had had their enough of struggling down the long, lonesome years. They hated to see her wasting her time with him. They had spoken to her, but still she had been seen with him. . . . Many a night now he was the cause of angry words in her father's house. . . . Daily they retreated full of sadness into thought of one another and nightly into one another's company. Yet all the time any possibility of their marriage seemed to be removing itself ever so far away. . . . Then

courage and wisdom seemed to flow towards them. Where was the use in feeling only defeat when between them they might make a brave victory of it? The land would put them asunder if it could, but God only knew that they might yet beat the land.

Oliver had by degrees assumed the responsibility almost of a family man. His industry began to be so amazing that the story of it was whispered everywhere around Dheel. . . . Even in the house of the Growneys the word was dropped almost in commendation by old Andy Giveney, who did not forget to say as well that "it was likely even Oliver would never over it," meaning the thing that had been done to the Moyleses by the Brays. A loss like that brought a kind of a curse that it was very hard to live down. A man might smash himself in smithereens working and yet never be able to get over the bad luck that came of a piece of foolishness.

Breedh, too, began to give up as much of her day-dreaming as she could suddenly rid herself of, and had come to be known as "a good, industrious girl." She was doing more than her rightful share of the work in the hope of being able to scrape together the few pounds which might justify her as a woman in the eyes of the Moyleses. Thus did a definite reputation of her begin to be spread abroad, and she came to be spoken of in Ballyscurlock and even as far as Castleconnor as a good girl, an extraordinary good working girl. . . . Old Andy Giveney, spending every evening and the better part of many a day in the house of the Growneys, had noticed this for himself. He was always most pleased to observe the like, for it seemed to denote a certain general determination, in the individual promise it signified, on the part of the people of Dheel to defeat again the forces that had sprung out of the land to rob them of comfort and prosperity. The phrase in which his thought was carried was almost lyrical to the ears

of Dheel—" A damn good working girl." It struck the turgid imagination of many a struggling farmer. A woman like that was often known to " make up " a man. And the laziness of a girl with a fortune had often been known to nearly " break " a man. . . . Andy Giveney afforded his assistance by shrewd insinuations one way and another. A curious intensity seemed suddenly to possess all that related to Breedh Growney. Illiterate scrawls by way of love-messages began to be carried by Andy Giveney, and he would come into the house where Breedh would be busy of an evening, giggling mirthlessly as he fished these communications out of the capacious pockets of his frieze coat, which had become too big and too long for his shrinking frame. He would put forth the recommendations of each of the men with such admirable impartiality as puzzled and confused Breedh. She would feel a little flattered, too, and without a thought of Oliver as she spoke with Andy. But just then Andy, overstepping himself, would give a " cut " about Oliver, and her whole being would be suddenly kindled. Yet he would always appear to have the best of it in the thing that he would say by way of final, biting reminder :

" It bees a foolish thing and a very foolish thing for a girl to get her name up with a fellow that has only a small, mane bit of land, and she having fine, comfortable, marriageable men adoring the very footprints of her feet and she walking the road."

Breedh would always get the old man a cup of tea and give him the price of an ounce of tobacco and he going away. To each of the seven men, maybe, who had sent the notes he would tramp in turn to tell of the fine, encouraging things that Breedh had said.

" A fine lump of a lassie entirely, I'm telling ye, a holy wonder at working, and mad for a man."

Soon the inevitable sequels to Andy's conniving were happening. Some of her suitors would be calling to

see Breedh as they passed the way half-drunk from fairs.

" The Lord save us and bless us, but here's another of them ! " she would say, rising up from her task of the moment, and looking out the window to see one of her uncouth lovers driving wildly into the yard and nearly whipping out the wooden pier of the gate with the other side of the car as he came. Then the man would stagger in, and sitting down at the fire stare foolishly after her as she moved about the house. If her father happened to be in the house at the time he would look upon the visitor with large approval, because no matter what his breeding or conduct might be this man was deserving of some respect upon one account alone—he had more land than themselves, and it was wholly in terms of the land that a husband's worth was accounted. And what was a man's daughter after all, a useless bit of a creature more or less a trouble about the house, beside the everlasting richness and glory of the green, kindly land ? . . . Breedh would always manage to make her escape from the house on one pretext or another, and maybe some hours later when the man would be driving out of the yard with but the encouraging chat of old Growney in his mind as his only earnest of Breedh, Breedh herself might be abroad with Oliver in some distant, windy corner of the fields of Dheel. . . . It would be her intention to return late, so as to ensure that her " lover " of the moment had left the house, but some mad twist of his drunkenness might have sent him back after he had driven some distance wildly towards his home, and she would find him taking tea with her father and mother in the parlour, half-drunk still, and they striving to sober him with the tea. There would be the obligation upon her to make him welcome, which would be successfully hidden until he had attempted to catch her in a rough embrace, and she had escaped in a condition midway between terror and disgust. . . .

So nothing came of all these comings despite the eagerness of the Growneys and the diplomatic industry of Andy Giveney. . . . The word came to be passed somehow amongst all the rivals that Breedh was as good as promised to Oliver Moyles, and that they were only making common idiots of themselves by bothering their heads about her, because she was a headstrong, self-willed faggot that would please herself. Smaller and poorer men, too, began to come then, but these she treated as a joke outright, and before their eyes. She would describe them to Oliver with laughter in her words, but he, however, did not cease to be somewhat troubled by the significance for which they stood. Even the worst of them were in better circumstances and really more marriageable than he was, for the destiny of all of them had been abridged only by Colonel Montagu Marlay and his breed, and not by any of their own breed or connection. . . . Sometimes, a dark blank across the gladness of their courtship, their talk would begin to flow almost dismally beneath the shadow of this apprehension.

Thus did it come, not as a surprise, but as something long expected quietly when upon her return through the windy dark from spending an hour with Oliver she saw Eugene Gavacan sitting by the fire gazing into it with the queer look in his eyes. In the very posture of him there on the chair did he wear the appearance of a man who had come to " ask for " her. In a flash of recollection that chilled her she remembered a word that Andy Giveney had dropped slily only a day or two before, but which at the time she had not taken seriously, its connection making it appear so utterly extravagant :

" And would ye ever imagine of all people who is thinking of putting his comether on you now only Eugeneen Gavacan, no less ? ' She's a sweet wisp of a lassie, you know,' says he to me the other evening, ' a bit flighty, you know, but other ways serviceable

enough, and I'd think nothing of running away with her body and bones ! ' There now for you, Breedhyeen ! And, sure you could run him into the asylum any time you liked. . . ."

She remembered to have laughed here, but Andy had continued with a great show of seriousness.

" . . . And then you might say you could marry Oliver Moyles, or, in fact, any other penniless ruffian you pleased, and even the Moyleses, as well as your own people, would wink the other eye when a chance would have been opened up to them of getting more of the land of Dheel that they had hoped for. D'ye mind, Breedhyeen ! People of your name done worse things in their time to get near a share of the good land than marry one with the mad, bad drop in them. I say, d'ye mind, Breedhyeen ? "

But she had not minded, merely forgetting until now, when she saw Eugene, the man who was " touched," sitting there before her. . . . There fell down upon her all suddenly a heavy night of foreboding. . . . Andy Giveney hobbled in, and, going up to Eugene, shook hands formally. . . . There was an air of eventfulness about the whole house. . . . Her father and mother were not in the kitchen. There were ominous sounds coming from all sides. . . . Her little brothers and sisters had evidently been put to bed. . . .

She was frightened, and already her face was flushed with excitement, for Oliver had just kissed her, and her hair was tumbled, and his strong arms had almost crushed the throbbing life from her heart. . . . The sounds grew more ominous . . . yet intimate, domestic, such as might happen anywhere in any house. She had seen an unusual sight in the little, dim parlour as she came up the road. . . . Now, from thence came the glad rattle of her mother's precious set of china, which was never used or exhibited excepting upon

wonderful occasions. The hunched, grinning figure of Eugene Gavacan was dressed in his Sunday best. His calves looked huge in box-cloth leggings. Her father, Hughie Growney, in respect to the occasion, had put on a stiff, high collar without a tie by way of full dress. Her mother had resurrected the puce dress with the great bustle in which she had been married, and now of a sudden did it seem to fill all the room with the mysterious colour of marriage. The men had already entered with enthusiasm into their talk about the land. Breedh slipped up to her room and began to cry. Some consolation was flowing in at last upon her tears when Andy called to her anxiously to put on her best dress before appearing in the presence of Eugene Gavacan. . . .

The tea, at least to Breedh, was dull and poor as a piece of entertainment ; few words were spoken. Now and then Eugene would strip his big teeth in an idiotic smile which made her feel shy and ashamed. Neither her father nor mother could think of anything to say which might fit the occasion, yet they felt the mutual importance of their common parentage. But Andy Giveney superimposed his vehemence upon the life that was so queerly stilled around the table. . . . Every now and then he wheezed out a " spell " which was the word they had in Dheel for an obscure agricultural joke embedded in agricultural slang. Eugene would then give a big " Pwhaugh-haugh ! " of a laugh, which, although mirthless enough, sounded loud in the little room, and showed in a way that he was pleased according to his lights, which was perhaps after all the whole purpose of the elaborate entertainment, dresses, china, Andy Giveney, and all.

There fell an awkward silence at the conclusion of the third cup of tea, and the heart of Breedh went pit-a-pat. Eugene Gavacan leaned his elbows upon the table and spoke formally :

" I called over to see you this evening, Hughie

Growney, and you, too, Mrs. Growney, to know, so I did, if yous'd let Breedhyeen here come over and live in our house always."

"Thank ye, thank ye, Eugene!" said Hughie Growney.

"I'm sure the pleasure is all ours," said Mrs. Growney, with a show of politeness fully in keeping with her splendour.

The eyes of Andy Giveney were bright and laughing with full approval.

All these words were of a sudden full of a sense of immense disaster which clutched at the very heart of Breedh. . . . The people and the objects in the room began to fade before her tear-filled eyes; the sound of the conversation floated only distantly to her ears. . . . Her mind rose in a glorious instant even upon broken wings. She was remembering fine words out of the only love story she had ever read, fine words, indeed, which had been spoken by a great lover entirely:

"I am that one," he had said, with a sudden assumption of possession which almost gave her pause, "and I am the one to make you happy. I am he. Since the beginning of the world, since time began, I have been running forth to meet you, and from the first moment of our meeting I knew that you were mine and that I was yours."

But now no fine words at all from Eugene Gavacan, only a look of possession which made her feel mean. . . . But her own vision was returning, powerful and clear above this look which almost blinded her. . . . Her mother, her father and Andy Giveney were leaving her alone with Eugene Gavacan. In this clear moment of her seeing she saw all her life roll out before her, joyless and broken to the end. . . . She burst wildly from the room. . . . Her mother returned anxiously to afford explanations to the "great match" that had come for her daughter.

" Musha, 'tis greatly excited over it she is, the poor thing, and indeed sure I was the very same way myself, so I was, and I going to be married to Hughie Growney."

Eugene grinned complacently, for he knew that he was already all as one as married to Breedh. There was very little breaking away that she could do now.

Breedh had been filled with an impulse to rush wildly from the house, but what was there outside but the fields crushing in with their ugly power. . . . The fields ! It was all because of the fields that knew no pity. . . . Once more in her room she abandoned herself to the flood of sorrow which burst like a torrent from her soul. She let fall her rich, heavy hair, and through the mirror in this dusky room looked long into her own wild, wild eyes, which might be unquiet now for evermore. . . .

She must have been a long while here, indeed until it had grown quite dark, but at last she was recalled to reality by her mother tap-tapping on the door and calling her. The elder woman stepped quietly into the dark room and threw her arms about her daughter who was going to be married.

" Musha, Breedhyeen alanna, sure, I know that marriage is the queer, strange thing, may God Almighty help all poor women. But sure, it's our lot, and you, too, must make the best of it. Now, sure, Eugene Gavacan is a great match, him having the loveliest lump of land in the whole country, and you'll never want for anything. Indeed and indeed, it's a far grander match you're making than I made with your father, for we had a hard struggle with only a middling poor way of living always. And look at the help it'll enable you to be to the rest of the childer ! . . ."

A little later Breedh went down with her mother and back into the parlour to discuss with the others as best she might the final arrangements for her wedding day.

CHAPTER VI

It was early morning of one of the biggest fairs of Ballyscurlock, but in the grey of the morning Ballyscurlock was without a sign of the great day that was upon it. A few drunken yardmen were already hobbling out expectantly as they opened the yard gates. Then each returned hurriedly and spat behind his respective door, for already to them the fair had begun on the night before. For cattle-jobbers and drovers had crowded in on the previous evening to stop in the publichouses, and many a cheap drink had been stirring. This would be a great day in Ballyscurlock, which was the best way of saying that it would be a great day for them. . . . Now as far as their bleary eyes could see the first signs of the fair were moving into Ballyscurlock. Little groups of cattle with men driving them were moving in from all the distant places of the fields. And in these the first to come were men full of the significance and colour of the fair, little, crabbed fellows, who came thus before the others so that they might get good strategic positions for the sale of their springers or their calves. As soon as they had made this goodly ominous move on the day, they began to rub the fresh tobacco between their hands for a new smoke. They broke into more comfortable converse then upon the prospects of the fair. Immediately it was upon themselves and the cattle they had to sell that their observations fell, but the succession of novelty in the very air around them lifted their conversation from moment to moment as something lifted by wave upon wave. . . .

The big, assured and deliberate men, the graziers, now beginning to arrive in their high gigs from all

parts of the County Meath, were to the men waiting for the sale of their cattle as the quick, successive chapters of a story which made of itself, too, the pageant of the fair. The smaller of the publichouse yards were already beginning to be dangerously thronged. . . . The publicans had taken down the shutters from their windows, and already the freshly sawdusted floors were being soiled by the heavily-nailed brogues. The first drinks were upon all the counters, and so the business of the day had already begun. The fair of a sudden was growing big and loud. It was rapidly assuming, too, its certain aspect of wildness. For occasionally a splendid beast would dash wild and lonely through the assembling groups of cattle, disturbing finally for the day the excellent positions of the men who had got up in the middle of the night to secure them. . . . Occasionally, too, would ring out the loud voice of a big and powerful man with a soft, wide-brimmed black hat. A jobber he might be either in pigs or cattle, yet truly a man who had gathered into his bearing the essential, romantic quality of the fair. There were men who followed the fair like that from a spirit of adventure. Maybe the spirit of acquisition has something to do with it, but they were essentially adventurers, and roamed, queer nomads of commerce, from one fair to another, their journeys taking them all over the Midlands and sometimes far into the North and West. There were even sharp subdivisions among these gentry of the roads, some travelled in their boots only, some upon high, light carts, which were occasionally given a touch of craziness by the possession of odd wheels, but no defective touch could linger long about the appearance of these chariots of the very gallant tinkers which proudly held the comely women of the warriors, each succeeding woman looking more than the last like the Queen of Sheba gazing down in splendour from her high, gorgeous throne, for around

her the shining cargo of cans was like a mountain of jewels in the sunlight. The men, the gallant masters of the women, with their dark mufflers knotted tightly around their necks, came into the fair with a look of pride which the richest farmer in Meath would not be able to accomplish. The pride of love was in their eyes, and the fire of love, for they had not bartered nor bargained for their women, but had won them in blood and battle in many a wild place of the roads. . . .

The tinkers represented the extreme type of the men of the roads, but there were varying degrees of the colour which each contributed to the fair. There were the mere tramps, the drovers, the pedlars, the trick-o'-the-loops, but all were essentially related in one aspect: they were emancipated from the land, each it would seem sufficiently to the needs of his own complete expression. They were adventurous aliens in this place, and so the eyes of the men rooted so firmly in the land turned towards them affectionately, and thus was created the sense of contrast which atoned for all the meaner aspects of the fair.

"How much d'ye want for the bit of a calf?"

"I'm asking seven pound ten."

"Seven meaous of me granny's cat."

"Would ye go be damned, mister, and I'm not asking your pardon."

Another man crushed in now to bring together the parties to the deal and make them slap hands. The man who wanted to buy the beast was animated only by a sneering indifference. Yet the ash-plant held under his oxter, by a slight flicker, expressed his nervousness with regard to the deal. The seller looked huffed, indignant, and with his face turned away. The man who sought to make an adjustment was vibrant with anxiety to grind his axe as best he could between the two. Yet the eyes of none of them gave token of their minds' endeavour. Their eyes were still the

shrewd, peasants' eyes. They made a little point of concentration in the midst of the fair. Around them were the now commercial tinkers, the besom-men, the basket-men, the men with the great creels of cabbage plants. Buyers for the big County Meath graziers were going about with lumps of raddle or sharp scissors or other implements of marking in their hands. Isolated groups of cattle were being swallowed up in the hastily collected droves which were being rushed down through the fair. The fair, even at this hour, was being thus emptied of its drovers. But, as if to replace the loitering groups they had made, the men who had owned the cattle were congregating in the vicinity of the bank. The certain manly beauty of the fair was now being maintained by other men, the sons of the older landlords of the sturdier breed, who had not yet allowed the grabber breed to replace them. Their military training and ascendancy traditions helped them to walk erect and proud through the fair in their well-fitting jackets or mackintoshes and neatly gaitered legs. Occasionally one saw a would-be uplifted lout of the grazier class who tried to ape them. Here at this very fair of Ballyscurlock such a fellow could be seen in the person of Albert Caffrey. He was over-dressed in very bad taste, for he had tried to make a gentleman of himself by copying various constituents of the make-up of those whom he considered most worthy of imitation. He looked undeveloped, more than unmanly, almost womanish, as he walked around after his father, who was something like a man, for he was still himself, Connor Caffrey, the great man of a neighbouring district of County Meath. Albert Caffrey looked merely bored as he moved about amongst the cattle, sheep, and pigs. But this was the father's place of pride and power. The triumph of his uprise from the peasantry was well expressed now in the proud strut of him as he went about in his blue pilot top-coat

and high, hard hat. His face had a harsh look which was accentuated by his severely-cut side-whiskers, and in odd moments his eyes seemed to roam distantly, after the manner of one who has gazed all his life upon cattle and wide spaces. Sometimes these eyes of his would sparkle into a kind of amazing ecstasy as he put down his hands and felt the big lumps of money in his breeches' pockets, while his mind said to himself:

"Ah-ha, no bank business for me when I'm buying cattle as near home as Ballyscurlock, but a big sheaf of notes in my hand, and I going through the fair like a raging devil."

The eye of Connor could see nothing to affect him in the meanness of his son, Albert, but it became downcast in a very sorrow of the grave when, even in this moment, he espied his brother, Johnton, upon the outskirts of the fair talking to two such notable ruffians as Andy Giveney and Shamesey Golligher from Garradrimna, who had come here to knock as much entertainment out of the fair as would appear advantageous and possible. Just now they were conducting experimental expeditions from publichouse to publichouse in the hope of finally settling into a nook of comfort where they might remain till closing-time, or, in the words of Shamesey Golligher himself, until they had drunk out the fair. Now the other two were blaming their unfortunate association with Johnton Caffrey for their ill-success so far. For although Johnton disclaimed all responsibility for the possession of such a brother as Connor he could never quite cleanse himself from the stain, especially upon a fair day. For as they would have been dodging hopefully on the outskirts of the makings of a fine, drunken crowd, the man standing the drinks at the moment would have looked at Johnton with a heavy sneer, and turning his eyes again to the window said:

"There's your beloved brother, Johnton, Connor Caffrey the grabber, and he going through the fair!"

And with that all the splash of laughter would have died down in the eyes of Shamesey Golligher until they became as sad, quiet pools, and the stories, such as they were, stuck in the mind of Andy Giveney before they could float out upon his tongue. . . . It necessitated another visit to the street in the hope of questing farther. And there, unfortunately, would be the brother of Johnton, Connor Caffrey himself, sweating under his high, hard hat through dint of acting the part of a great man before those from whom he had sprung. A peasant himself, he would be keen to observe the smirk of derision upon every face, both for himself and for his son, Albert. . . . His eye fell evilly now upon his brother, Johnton, in the company of two such pals. Shamesey Golligher, undaunted by his failure, was beginning to laugh satirically, making the striking and notable figure of Connor a butt for his Rabelaisian glee. Andy Giveney, too, was beginning to cackle peevishly. . . . He was making allusion to the story of Connor, which was essentially a story of the land.

When Connor had married Agnes Brauder, the woman that had borne him Albert, he had only been a labouring man, but a fine cut of a fellow at that, who had being sufficiently well matched with the daughter of Abraham Brauder, the Fenian.

But circumstances had come to uplift Connor, curious circumstances indeed. It was said that it was he, and not the man of the Growney family, that should have shot the ruffian Marlay, for he had been balloted to do it, and had failed through cowardice or treachery of some kind or another. It was said that a kind of a qualm came into his heart when he stood outside the window of old Marlay's place in Grangemore, and just before he had gone in and demanded of Marlay to prepare to meet his God. And how the fear of hell had caused Marlay to offer him a fairly large sum to save his life. And how the man of the Growneys had

done the work a little later, while Connor had been able to stock a bit of land for a start, and embark upon that prosperity which had ended in the possession of Grangemore. But when Abraham Brauder had led the people against him to have the land smashed up he had, by way of reprisal, put his wife, Ellen, the daughter of Abraham, away from him. And although this was something done in the full blast of his power and strong manhood, it had stood as well for the beginning of his decline. Abraham, whose proud Fenian blood had become watered down, perhaps because of the mad preoccupation of his country with Constitutionalism, had threatened the law upon Connor, thus necessitating the signing over of Grangemore to Johnton, who had hung around him, a drunken millstone, for twenty years, because it was he alone of all the world knew the true story of the " shooting " of Marlay. Now was he given the means of a double experience of power over his brother, and upon occasion would think nothing of driving a beast or a sheep off the land and selling it to get the means of enjoyment. . . . As the eye of Connor caught his the cruelly reciprocated look of the tormentor and the tormented passed between them. . . . A little later Connor felt that he would have to be meeting his persecutor in some of the yards of the pubs and passing him on the sly some of the fine money he had brought with him to air his pride at the fair. He writhed in his torment there in the midst of the steaming ruck of men and beasts, and his great hand clenched upon the crook of his stick as if he would almost crush the tough timber of it to the finest fibre.

And it was thus that the promiscuity of Ballyscurlock fair became focussed here and there to points of drama, for the fair was a concentration of the human overflow of the land. In almost every corner all the vague impulses of the fields surrounding any single family to the making of any single personality were now being expressed

as an event in keeping with the colour of the fair and the nature of the fields.

The mists of the morning had lifted and the sun now shone down straight and clear upon the wet, dirty street where the fair was being held. The cattle looked bedraggled, and the men looked bedraggled, all mud and dirt and dung. Thus fell a greater drabness with the flowing in of the light.

Its rich colour was fading from the fair, even as all things must fade. The light eagerness of the morning had been replaced by some of the more powerful, dogged qualities of the land. The muck and mud of the street was a perfect mirror for the dark thoughts which came in now, like the dark thoughts which came in wet fields of clay on a day when the spring was late. . . .

The fair had been emptied of its finest men and beasts, and all down either sidewalk there were small groups which made of themselves poor parodies of the fair; hagglers over scraggy calves, men to whom the fortunes of the fair had not been kindly, and who would go home most gloomily now to their houses amid the fields. The pubs were all full of men, who were entertaining themselves like men who had a right to do so now that they had done their business at the fair.

The general movement towards gaiety would occasionally produce an extraordinary moment to lift up again the drooping spirit of the fair; men tired of the company of one another would invite one another out into the yard for a "trip or two," and once there, draw blood from one another with cuts of ash-plants along the skull. The other men would return from their enjoyment as spectators and resume their entertainment with a fine sense of satisfaction, their mouths full of material for future comment and chat.

Then, too, the evening would occasionally be revived in the completion of some comic unity by some appa-

rently irrelevant human being. Now it was " Alanna," as they called her—Alanna McPartland—who always made a point of behaving, just so far as her sex would allow, exactly like a man whenever she appeared at a fair. It was not without its touch of amusement to hear her use cattle-dealing expressions and big curses, and with a fine flourish blow the froth off a pint with the best of them. She seemed eager to hurry her personality all through the fair, through every twist and turn of the fair, in very vehement illustration of her mannishness.

The other character who just presently needed a good deal of emphasis and exaggeration was Dominick Jiles, an ancient hunchback with the red eyes of a ferret, and who always carried a little kippeen in his hand. The framework of his personality was built up around the fact of a proud boast, which was that he had never gone home from a fair in Ballyscurlock without beating a man or making his best to beat a man. There never had been a great deal of strength in his arm, but he had often drawn blood. Now, however, the only slap he was capable of giving could at the most call up only a poor parody of pain. Yet still, so strong was the sense of his tradition embedded in him, that even now he never left without giving a blow, even such as he could give. It was while waiting his opportunity that one saw the real Dominick Jiles—the hunched body creating a bird-like effect behind the little, gleaming eyes as he waited in some archway or in the shadow of a yard-gate for someone he might consider himself safe in striking to go by. Most often it was a drunken man in the last stages just before he was about to fall. Many a fine bit of a reputation for achievement had thus been won by Dominick, and he would brag of having knocked down a man seven times as big as himself with one blow. But it was not so easy and it was always a bit of a risk to hit the

drunkenest drunken man. Indeed, he was often put to the pin of his collar, as he said, to find the material for a clout, and as a last resource, to retain his reputation, had frequently beaten young, innocent gossoons and sent them home howling to their mothers. It was fine to see Dominick take the hill out of Garradrimna with the *kippeen* held tighter under his arm, and a look on his face as of one who would hold up his hand always even if his physical disability kept him from holding up his head. . . . He would slap each leg in turn with the *kippeen*, the proudest man leaving the fair, although he might not at the very moment have much more than sixpence in his pocket.

Alanna and Dominick had played their little parts at the fair in the way appointed for them, and now they had long since gone down the road to meet the shadows which were fast creeping towards them from the fields. Soon down this way, too, must be going the men with the wild songs in their mouths. Yet there was a quiet time now at the end of the fair, just as if the great scene had never been at all. Sometimes the women of Dheel came in to do their shopping at this hour, the shops being too thronged earlier in the day, and as well to see that their own men were gone home clear of the danger which always arose at the end of the day.

And it was at this moment that Breedh Growney chose to show her comely person in Dheel. She looked the more beautiful to Seumas Darcy, his eyes lifted from the stragglers in Jamesey Ryan's shop, where he had come to work from Castleconnor, because she was so small and bright against the dark background of the fair, which, still so clearly remembered, filled all his consciousness. He had a sudden, burning thought of Fanny, and in this to him the fair day of Ballyscurlock knew its moment of atonement.

CHAPTER VII

It was the first news of a marriage when it came to him that helped to drive the soul of Seumas Darcy into the mood which was destined to envelop him finally. His mind would be stung into a certain anguish of thought as he pictured Fanny, with whom he had gone to school, now far over the sea. Marriage! The word always burned itself into his mind. It stood for an important sort of thing that often happened here, yet it was the very air of importance which surrounded it that seemed to make it of such infrequent occurrence. It often took quite a long time to accomplish a marriage between two of the farming class. They might have been a great while courting when suddenly some bit of good luck upon one side or the other would cause people to see that, at long last, the miracle had been effected. The position as fully qualified shop-boy "out of his time," which Seumas now held in Ryan's publichouse in Ballyscurlock was one which qualified him well to be having impersonal thoughts on marriage.. He would be thrown often into the most intimate relation to marriage arrangements. He would be the attendant upon the conspirators, bringing drinks into the tap-room or parlour where the plot concerning some young couple would be developing. He would almost come to feel one of themselves as he brought them the means of saying out their say. But the arrangements would be passing behind closed doors, and it was not until these would come to be intensified by the talk in the public bar, the words hitting hurtfully upon his mind as they fell, that he began to feel their essential relation to himself. It was the form of drunken talk which he heard most clearly above all the other

kinds of maudlin conversation, half remembered through the sound of their sameness in his mind. The words which he heard not very long after Breedh had been in the shop stung his ears to an intense effort of listening :

" It's funny. It's quare, so it is, and no mistake. D'ye think will she be able to keep him from getting mad ? "

" The Lord save us, isn't she a grand young girl to go marry a savage omadhaun like him ? Maybe it's what he'll go kill her itself and she in a delicate state of health."

" Well, begad, it's a quare turn to go see her marrying Eugene Gavacan in the heel and she so damnable great with Oliver Moyles from the time they were childer, as you may say. And the fine, constant, loving way they used to be courting and all. As a matter of fact, sure they used to be inseparable at a dance or the like. Sure, it's often Eugene must have seen them at a house of enjoyment, and he falling like a common idiot upon the floor, and both of them dying laughing at him and they in one another's arms. Mebbe it's what he'll be remembering all that to her. . . . Remembering all that to her. . . ."

Why were they causing him to remember all that to himself. The school-days, the dancing-nights. Ah, goodness me ! . . . And he knew that they would go on talking like this, the drink making them ever more and more sentimental towards the production of prate whose poison of itself would stir the poison of his mind and mix with it to make a black, muddy flow. A touch of fine reality would maybe come to him later as a red flash when the painful duty to his master would devolve upon him of kicking out old Andy Giveney, who might happen to be there if it were any kind of a notable evening, remaining here to talk about even those who had just entertained him, saying something about the old landlords not being as bad as they were

painted, and mebbe not half as bad as the stingy grabbers who were their present masters. . . . The moment happened, even as he had expected, just at closing time, an hour whose quality never held any disappointment. The old, old man looked like a very ancient rat as he was flung out headlong. . . . Then Seumas rushed off to find some solace through the dream which had refilled his mind. . . . Bulging his breast pocket he had her photograph still, and all the letters which she had sent back to him since her going to America. His fingers knew a certain sensation of affection when his hand touched them as he searched for the notebook and pencil that created between them the memoranda which eventually found its way into many greasy ledgers as a permanent record of Ryan's business. . . . While he lit matches in the dark of the shed to view the photo from which the likeness to any human being at all was becoming rapidly obliterated by constant usage he said, with a world of meaning loomimg dark and gloomy behind his words : " Good God ! Good God Almighty ! " There was only one thing for it, the mean comfort that had ever flowed out of all such places as Ballyscurlock, the lonely comfort of the bottle which seemed to be a solace for all woe.

It was so easy—the bottles in the stores and the bottles in the shop. . . . It was so cursedly easy, indeed, to make the attempt to sail away, so very hard to get any distance whatsoever, for the result was ever the same, a night that slipped into forgetfulness, and then a wild, dark morning, passing into a day which he did his best to smash by the means that were springing out of the very life around him, and so were very near to his hand.

It was thus that this night passed, moving just even thus into the next day. . . . Jamesey Ryan, his suspicions leaping gradually higher for some time past,

noticed him through the foolish stare that was coming into his eyes, and which a day like this brought out to the fullest and starkest and most pitiful. . . . As the master of such a man it naturally gave him an unquiet feeling, and he proceeded to mark the bottles of whiskey that were in use by drawing, rather peevishly, a little, severe stroke with a nail. . . . It was a most infernal business the way a man was robbed. Seumas was always driven to contrive nicely to defeat his master. It was as well that in this world there was always a trick to beat a trick. . . . Now, people would be ordering extraordinary numbers of drinks in the tap-room and in the dark passage between the counter and the room he would be consuming in savage, secretive gulps half of the whole trayful. His face would glow like a red coal, a window to the conflagration of his mind. . . . Ryan, returning a little later to peer narrowly at the marks on the bottles, would be surprised to find his assistant still more drunk, although the stuff had not dwindled too alarmingly below the marks, for there was a lot of people in the shop all drinking well. And even thus did it happen exactly on the next day. . . .

On one of his stumbles out from the tap-room he saw his schoolmate, big Oliver Moyles from Dheel, standing in the dark nook by the foot of the stairs enjoying his pint richly to all seeming. They were flashed into the immediate sympathy of full understanding. Both in a way had lost their girls. He by Fanny going over the ocean wave to America, Oliver by the misfortune of Breedh being now going to marry this madman, Eugene Gavacan. They shook hands.

" Me sound man, Seumas ! "

" Me sweet fellow, Oliver ! "

A wink passed between them then to tell that there would be another stray glass or maybe two upon the next trayful of drinks that might pass tap-room-wards.

Ryan went out of the bar now in pure madness. There was no use in trying any more what he had found to be impossible down through the years, the finding of a sober shop-boy. Even this lad from Dheel that he was after having such great expectations of. Look at the way he was after turning out! It was enough to destroy a man.

In a few minutes Oliver and Seumas were taking sup for sup in the dark nook under the stairs. Their talk fell black with gloom as they attempted to re-create the brightness of their schooldays, almost with the vehement sentiment of Andy Giveney, saying out as best he could, between wheezy stutters, some bewildering tale of his young days amid the tumults of the tithe war and the land war and the hunger and the murderings. . . . It was for the like of this that he had so recently been kicked out of the house by Seumas, for going a little too far with the talk that he himself was talking now.

"Lookid! Lookid, musha them was the great times entirely, only there was too much of the common idiot about us to see it."

"Oh, boys a day, it's little ever we thought in those days that the world was such a rotten, pitiful hole."

"Drink off that!"

"Good luck, Seumas avic!"

"You'll have to excuse me saying it, Oliver, but lookid, I was more than sorry so I was when I came to hear of your present trouble. I was odious sorry entirely to hear of Breedh going to marry the lunatic. It's a sore blow to you, but a sup of a drink will see you over it. Musha, Oliver, the sorra a much luck she'll have for deceiving you."

"Well, good luck, and devil take it anyway!"

"Good luck, and don't forget to keep an odd drop in you so as not to let the heart go drooping."

"And to think of the times we used to have and we going to school. Something barbarous, don't you know,

the notions that'd spring into us and the things we'd do. Myself running after Breedh and she destined in the end to be owned by a comfortable savage. And yourself, Seumas, a kind of united already to Fanny Soraghan, the poor little thing that's now far away from you in the bowels of America as you might say. How is she going on at all ? "

" Oh, grand. I had a letter from her last Tuesday week. She says she's going on fine and that she's thinking of taking a trip across to Ireland. A trip, mind you, suggesting a thing of nothing, is her way of saying the long voyage across the watery miles of the great Atlantic. I can't but think of that, a trip, just the same as if I said I was going to Dublin for the fifteenth of August or to see the Punchestown Races. It'd be something grand to see her."

" D'ye hear from her often ? "

" Musha, indeed, then, I do. Every second week as regular as the clock."

" Isn't she great now to correspond with you so fine and prompt ? "

Oliver looked out long and wistfully as he said this. Then he took a sudden gulp at his pint and his eyes fell to the floor. His voice seemed to well into an immense sadness as he spoke again :

" Aye, it's a fine devotion she has to you, surely. Them that bees the farthest away bees the truest after all, them that a fellow'd give nearly his heart's blood to only go and marry another in the end. Get us another pint ! "

While Seumas went out into the shop Oliver seemed to feel the descent of his mood more darkly upon him, darkness of the nook by the stairs, where he was still standing, darkness of the drink he was going to take. . . . It was broken by the return of Seumas almost so instantaneously, the sound of his " Here ! " the hurried movement of the glasses passing to their lips. Oliver,

not fully sprung to freedom from his blinding thought, spoke again and again wildly.

" Begad, if I had a gerrl as faithful to me as Fanny I'd never drink a drop, for the way I'd look at it would be in what I'd say to myself: ' Now where is the use of striving to drown gladness ? ' And I'd be glad, surely, Seumas, if it was that case with me. It's only like now when I think of my lovely little Breedhyeen going to marry that dirty big bags of a Eugene Gavacan that I'd ever feel like going mad only for the sup of drink."

" Throw it there, Oliver, my old son ! You have the true comradely consideration for me, right enough, but you don't know my heart. Ah, Lord, you don't know my heart. It's the abominable life I have to live here in this shop through every day in the year that drives me to it. It's no life, so it isn't, for a young fellow. Labouring for drunkards in the shop all day and I feeling in my very heart that I'm never going to get away from the smell of porter as long as I'm alive. So you see it's a lovely future that I have before me. I'll soon be getting gray about the temples and droopy about the mouth, with the hellish torment of it all, and the devil a wonder. I won't be much of a character for any woman to be setting her eyes on when she comes over the wild seas from wandering in foreign lands."

The real and greater sadness of Seumas's lot was borne in all silently upon Oliver until it left him without a word in his mouth. Poor Seumas, the poor, unfortunate devil, anyway. He was going a way now that would prevent him ever having even a publichouse of his own, a little, dirty, stinking house like this, which in a way was the greatest fortune he might ever hope to attain. Although he had got the offer through commercial travellers of jobs in big, distant towns beyond Castleconnor and Mullaghowen, and had not

taken them, he was becoming more fully convinced of his failure from day to day. If Fanny Soraghan returned from America in a few years time he would not have any way of life made for her at all, because what money he did not spend in " knocking about " on Sundays he had to give to his people over in Dheel to assist the fortunes of the family. In his appearance he had not won even to the uplifted condition of the shop-boys from Castleconnor and the other places who had almost made themselves a part of his boyhood's dream. He was more like a common scamp than a decent shop-boy, although he worked hard and well for Ryan—when he was sober.

He had developed one most curious side of himself, a taste for reading all the sentimental nonsense of his time, from *The Emerald* to every tattered novel that came his way. He had in consequence acquired a fine, romantic style in his letters, which may probably have been the reason why these had captivated Fanny into such faithfulness, so much a part did they appear of that vision of romantic Ireland to which she in exile gazed so fondly. Often in his room after closing time he wrote like one crazed by drink and dreaming. He would work himself into a great frenzy of affection upon many sheets of red and blue ruled paper torn from one of Ryan's account books, the day-book or the ledger. . . . From all the wild wandering of his mind his letter would often break into the reality of remembrance that was but another dream—the lovely, distant days of their school-going, the crab-tree orchard, Oliver Moyles, Breedh Growney, Eugene Gavacan, Andy Giveney. . . . The letters she wrote in return were not undistinguished by some wistful turn of remembrance, but for the most part they reflected unconsciously only the cruel reality of the life she was living.

It would seem that she was sometimes thankful for his messages of affection, sometimes angry, for more

than anything else did his letters make her feel the heavy disappointment at the heart of the life he made all rose-hued, the life, after all, in which so few had the true courage of a husband. . . . Would her Seumas working in the saloon, as she thought of it, at home in Ballyscurlock be in a position to marry her when she returned home. She had already a tidy penny saved, and America was the hard and lonely country for a girl, although after the fashion of all American letters it was another vision of it that she tried to put into her letters home to even Seumas, who might be her own man some day. . . .

She had known one great moment, grand and flashing, which had suddenly brightened all the drabness of her days in exile. It was the morning that she had received a letter enclosing a poem for which Seumas had won a prize in one of the weekly papers. There must be something grand in him, surely, to have written this, even if his letters as well were always beautiful, a piece of poetry just like Tom Moore.

It seemed as if the whole being of Seumas had been applied to the accomplishment of this poem, for it was in the nature of things that he was destined never to write another. But in this he had surely embodied some immortal part of him that had gone winging forever, into high, bright skies, from out the dark and shadowed places of the land. It seemed strange that such thoughts should have come to him, or that he could ever have written them down so well. Yet all the lines had come thronging brightly into his mind one evening that he had gone out walking the Garradrimna road after a hard day in the shop, it having been the day of the August fair in Ballyscurlock :

> Along the August road they pass,
> Down by the fields of dewy grass,
> Three men from Ballyscurlock Fair
> Their minds on cattle and on care,
> Three weighty men all full of pride
> And walking stoutly side by side.

While never do they lift their eyes
To view the wide and sweet surprise
Which stretches down the August ways,
The fruit of sunlit, summer days.
Their minds are all on beasts and gold,
How this man bought, how that man sold.

" Bedad ! " and " Mebbe, mebbe so,
I had no right to let them go ! "
While bent beneath their heavy load
Their minds are on the August road
Which leads to winter and the grave
And from what pride their gold them gave.

But later down the same white way
Three men came marching light and gay.
No wealth have they but what the night
Brings with its beauty to their sight,
Yet clear to mix with August's breath
They sing high songs of love and death.

They sing them to the clean night wind
Which, softly lapping, helps to bind
The hair of summer ere she goes
With scents of hay-field and of rose,
While wide o'er fields their golden bars
Flow out afar to mock the stars.

And thus from Ballyscurlock Fair
Along by fields all rich and rare
Come some unladen, some with load,
Along the fragrant August road,
While the grey eyes of winter see
Death softly steal on field and tree.

For a long while after he had written this Seumas felt himself a better man than he had ever been, but slowly he was being pulled deeply into the life from which this in its way was an earnest of effort to escape. But in one of the far places of America lonely Fanny Soraghan read it with almost pitiable frequency, a great gladness thronging her soul as she lived again through the scenes it pictured and the thoughts it fancied.

CHAPTER VIII

There were times when the fields of Dheel spoke out their message, but only as a ghostly whisper of loneliness to loneliness. For it was lonely here at noontide, lonely at midnight, always lonely. And yet the fields would be ever whispering, telling old stories of their own making which flowed down the roads to the little places, to Garradrimna and Ballyscurlock and Ballycullen, and over the hills to Castleconnor and Mullaghowen. Through the strength of these impregnated tales the very fields coming up to the roadside were almost of flesh and blood, saying out their say across the hawthorn hedges. And so it was that the fields held their power over the life of Dheel, compelling the course of everything that might happen here. Men and women often tried to do things secretly for fear that the fields might hear, but the fields were always listening, and were cruel and loved to spoil the brightest plan. Than any sadness they could possibly enforce such as the broken ending of Oliver's love for Breedh, it was always in the depths of them to remember a sadder story, which they out of their malevolence had also made.

Here in Dheel, where the years passed so quietly, the smallest event seemed spread over a great space of time, and it took a long while to shape to their full significance the figures of any dream or doom against the sombre background of the land. One passed by cottage doors and never saw from day to day a sign of growing old upon the faces which looked out of dusky houses. A woman might have come to one of these houses a fine woman, " a fine cut of a lassie," as they would have said of her when she had come, and already

she would have " flooded the place with little childer." And yet she would lean sometimes over the half-door now to look at a man she had once danced with, maybe, and kissed in a far-back, lonely night. . . . Her face might still be fair and her form fine, although the house behind her was full of squalling, ragged children and there was a sick baby in the cradle. . . . One met the same men hard by the very same spots on the roads, and saw them going out into the same fields at the very same time every day to do the same tasks. The eagerness with which people talked of the most insignificant trifles showed that no great thing had ever happened here, and yet, beneath many folds of guiltiness, there lay somewhere the essential passion. . . . At the ends of long boreens which gazed out vacantly upon the road there were great stories hidden, where they had been blown by the whispering breath of the fields, as bits of paper with writing on them are often blown by the wind into dusty roadside nooks. Long tales of agony through which men and women, but mostly women, had suffered, without any flash of nobility or grandeur lighting up all the poor, cold, wet fields. Somehow the grand atonement of death had never flashed out to cleanse, for this was a peaceable part of a religious, Christian country. Life moved outwardly in quietude beneath the few controlling forces which drew their power from the land. The old story of what Father Carrigy, a former P.P., had once said to Father Broderick, a former C.C., was now only as a tale that was told to signify somewhat richly the things which many said had really happened here in the good old times.

This worthy reverend gentleman, Father Broderick, had always done his best to keep the parish " decent," and it was his proudest boast that he had always, with his stout blackthorn, cut the legs off any fellow he had ever caught roaming through the dusk in a lonely place

with a girl in his arms. Many a time his superior had found it expedient to reprove his curate's very pious manfulness. One time at least so finely as to effect almost a tradition in which the story still survived.

" Look here, Broderick ! " the old man had said, " I think you're making a little too free with that big stick of yours."

" How is that, Father Carrigy ? "

" You're making it take lonely walks," said the Parish Priest, his eyes twinkling shrewdly.

" I am, Father Carrigy, and I must appeal from your implication of cruelty. As a conscientious man I must try to put a stop to all immoral conduct in this parish."

" It's very fine and plucky of you, I know, but all the same it's not wise."

" Not wise ? How not wise ? "

" Well, d'ye see, if they don't company-keep they won't court, and if they don't court they won't marry, and if they don't marry what's going to become of chaps like us ? "

There were some who told this story with gusto still, but somehow its comic strength and meaning had dwindled down, and it now raised but a flicker of laughter as it were, when it fell almost as something out of a foreign land upon a sense of dull, accepted lovelessness.

Just once the shapes and significance of what might have been a great tale of love had sprung up in Dheel. It was a thing that might have taught them how fine a thing it is to love, but its rich telling had sounded unheard, or to live only as a mean remembrance, for something full of the quality of this life had ended the music that it seemed filled with a great longing to make, and which might have changed all the life of these fields to its sound and colour.

. . . . . .

When Mary Galway came to service at Michael

Heffernan's the only one of the rich family who made any attempt to show her even a little bit of kindness was Arthur Heffernan, the brother of Michael Heffernan who was dead, and who was allowed to live on here, in the kitchen and the yard of the big house, by Mrs. Heffernan, the widow of he rich man. Poor old Arthur, who used to spend such a long time lacing up his boots every morning, for it would appear that the posture relieved the pain of his aching body as he bent down over his knees. Then he would hobble out heavily and spend the day moving about the yard with two buckets in his hands carrying their feed and drink to the stall-feeding cattle and to pigs in the stye. He often passed a kind word with Mary in the mornings, and so she was always pleased to listen to his complaints whenever she met him crossing the yard and as he put down his buckets to speak to her.

" It's a queer world, Mary, and this is a hard, cursed place to be living. A mean, begrudgeful crew the people of this place are. Even my late lamented brother, Mary, even him. He was a rich man and he departing, for he was after getting all out of me that he could, after besting me out of all he could. He put me out on the road then, and the road made smithereens of my feet. It flattened them out something shocking, the way that you see them now, and so that they'll scarcely go into the biggest pair of brogues I can buy in Garradrimna, and when the roads bet me, sure I had to come back here to do my endeavours for a bite and a crust. They take a huge delight, at least the beloved wife of my late lamented brother, Mrs. Susan Heffernan, does, in taking it out of me as she thinks, but I'm a quare hawk that went winging down many a dark road by myself, and maybe we'll see yet what we'll see in the way of revenge."

It might have been only because he wanted someone to whom he could complain that old Arthur had first

spoken to Mary, for at heart he was as proud as any of his breed, and the handling of a little money would see him blazing into pride again after a fashion that must surely lead him into the condition of trampishness from which he had only just returned to his present way of life. And he would repeat the declarations of his intentions with great vehemence to Mary.

"If I ever get a chance you'll see me rising out of my present afflicted condition to be a kind of a credit to the breed of the Heffernans."

There was something tiresome after all in the old man's talk, something as well that was like a promise of dark treachery in it, from which Mary turned instinctively, and besides this her young blood and beauty called for a richer consolation than might ever flow out to her dancing mind from an old man's lamentations.

The summer, too, was now blowing high and wild over the land, and voices were calling to her heart from beyond the trackless world of the fields. Then she saw someone come into the yard one morning, someone who greatly filled her longing even in the sudden, glorious moment of his first appearance. It may have been that he had a different cut about him from the other labourers who generally came here, and by reason of which he now walked erect and proud. Her mind from the very first began to cling in affection almost insensibly to his great strength.

He was no slave of labour, but instead a very prince of labour. He was the only son of the widow Glynn. Shaun Glynn his name was, and with the turn of the tide of land tenure in Ireland he had won to an independence that placed him almost with those who were uplifted in pride on the land like the Heffernans.

His mother, Ellen Glynn, had, earlier in her days, been a servant here in this very same house of the Heffernans, marrying early Michael Glynn, who had been a labourer here, and they had gone to live in a

cottage on the Ballyscurlock road. It had been a long and a hard struggle, but she was a good woman and had triumphed well. Although they still lived on here in the cottage, the two of them only, for Michael Glynn was dead, Shaun Glynn had cattle and land of his own, and his mother hoped if she had at all, even in the end, to resign herself to the fact of marriage that it was a great match he would make. All the pride of her triumph was reflected in him, and it was something that pleased her well to see him go, as an equal, to give Mrs. Heffernan a hand with the sowing or the hay-making or the harvest. She knew a fine moment when the proud wife of the rich, dead man would send over a special messenger to request the help of her son, and she would remember the moments she had felt when as a servant girl in the Heffernans she had looked almost in envy upon such fine, strong, independent men coming into the yard.

She had no notion that it was in just this very way all over again that Mary Galway was now looking upon her own son. In fact, she scarcely knew already of this girl with the pretty face from another part of the parish who was here now in Michael Heffernan's. And thought of dangers circling about her son was averted by her immense pride in the triumph that had made her a woman of independence to whom thought of a servant girl was very lowly indeed.

Yet it was altogether because of this that quite a new regard was being made to surround the life of Mary Galway, and a great brightness to dance in the eyes of her that looked out from her gladness upon all things. . . . It was surely the sweetest comfort to have the eyes of this fine young man, this Shaun Glynn, upon her as she moved about the yard. She could almost feel the soul of him and the look of him and the great heart of him already burning into her life. She felt all life newly with a great delight. . . . Whenever

she passed a word with anyone as she crossed the yard it was with Shaun Glynn that she passed the word. She grew gradually to have scarcely a look for old Arthur.

It is a slight, small thing that may turn the thoughts of a man, of even an old man. It could not be anything of love, yet maybe it was because of a thought of the same that he had been reminded by the rich beauty of Mary Galway. Maybe it was something that had sprung towards no good ending out of the life of this house and place, and the disregard of Mary Galway may have been merely fanned into this little, mean flame so that a greater burning might be made. When she passed him now as he walked across the yard and went up to speak with Shaun Glynn his mind always began to hurry passionately towards plans of revenge, and through these his hope of lifting up his life again. Naturally his thought and hope began to be phrased in terms of the realism of this house of the Heffernans. Cattle, land, and money, these were the three words which in their full significance shaped the purpose which, although dark and silent in his heart down through all the long, broken years, now of a sudden came howling and whooping into his mind with a strength that was full of evil and grim determination.

After the May fair of Garradrimna there would be a considerable sum of money in the house from sale of the fine cattle that had been fattened on the rich land. It was vexatious in a way to think that it was Shaun Glynn who would have the selling and not himself, whose right almost by nature it should be, because he was his brother's brother. Shaun Glynn the stranger, the servant-girl's son, would have usurped him in his rightful place, and because of this there was already a double crookedness of purpose animating the dark crowd of his intentions.

It was the afternoon of the May fair day, and Shaun was taking his dinner in the parlour of the big house. This was as a certain tribute to the trust that had been reposed in him. Arthur and the other men who had helped him with the cattle at the fair were eating in the kitchen, eating greedily and without any trace of daintiness, for they had taken an amount of drink at the fair. Arthur Heffernan fell easily among these rough men. He had spent his life with their like, yet now he felt for the first time to its fullest the unbearable torture of the slights that were always being put upon him in this house. The son of the woman he had once seen here as a common servant was eating in the parlour, and the servant-girl of the present, this dark-eyed, pretty little Mary Galway, was dancing attendance upon him and minding the men in the kitchen scarcely at all, nor himself either, who should be naturally master of this house if it were not for all this misfortune of his whole career. He was feeling it with an unaccustomed keenness, for the preoccupation of his mind had successfully prevented him from getting drunk to-day. His mind was working nimbly. . . .

Complete intoxication, his desired condition of old, stood for a certain amount of acquiescence in his lot. But now his mind was urged after a fashion which denoted upon his part some effort to break the bonds which bound him. There was a certain hateful eagerness upon him now as he watched every slight movement of the life around him. Mrs. Susan Heffernan was preparing herself to go into Garradrimna before the bank would close to put by most of the money which Shaun Glynn had brought home from the sale of the cattle at the fair. Arthur knew well the habits of the house, and at the present moment could almost tell to a sixpence the amount that would be kept in the old press upstairs for incidental expenses of the house and farm. Often had he gone and opened this press in the days gone by and looked at the store of money it might

contain, yet, strange to say, he had never taken any of it, although many a time he had been sorely tempted indeed, because of some little drink bill in Garradrimna. But somehow it had always appeared as if he would be robbing the Heffernans or himself, and he was still strong with the pride of the Heffernans as the biggest part of his soul. But now he felt that it was different, and he knew as well that there would be about thirty pounds in the press. He never cursed the dalliance of a woman more than now, when he felt that Mrs. Susan Heffernan was dallying and dallying before the big mirror upstairs as she went on adorning her widowed state.

The couple in the parlour, the girl attending and the man who was being attended upon, were taking advantage of the absence of the woman of the house from the scene. For the first time in all their intercourse they were richly magnified in one another's eyes. . . .

There grew up around the snatches of their talk the noble structure of a dream. This house and land. It was fixed essentially in terms of the life they knew. He repeated for her pleasure portion of a poem which a genius of these parts had written :

> "Had I but wealth of land and bleating flocks,
> And barnfuls of the yellow harvest yield,
> And a large house with climbing hollyhocks,
> And servant maidens singing in the field,
> You'd love me, but I own no roaming herds,
> My only wealth is songs of love for you,
> And now that you are lost, I may pursue
> A sad life below the depths of words."

Mary Galway nearly cried as the last two lines broke like rich music upon her ear. . . . These held the touch of pathos which made separation appear such a monstrous thing. But why should they ever let anything separate them ? Very near to her was the fine

reality of the man she loved, and around him was rising the proud shapes of the house that she hoped he would build for her sake. She could see it standing up so rich and fine from the bright green ground of her mind. "The large house with climbing hollyhocks." They were talking and talking. . . .

Mrs. Susan Heffernan had gone to Garradrimna, and they were talking still. She would be home soon. It was a moment for decision, and their dream was about them all brightly now. He had asked her and she had consented. They were going to get married as soon as ever they could.

It was surely a brave resolve in this above all places, where scarcely anyone ever married for love. And, besides that, enormous obstacles rose up stark and imminent before them. Their poverty in the first place seemed to stand at once for the means of making love fly out the window. But in the sudden, tremendous moment that was upon them they never thought, either of them, of any calamity that might come. She did not think of the proud woman, his mother, the woman who had come to be in reality what she now saw as half a dream. He was an only son, and any mother at all thinks it a hard thing to see her son marrying, especially if he be an only son, marrying, even somebody rich and grand, not to speak of a girl far beneath him, utterly beneath him, indeed, as she must now view this coming marriage to one of the exact station from which she had uprisen. Besides, bad and all as that was, Mary had been in service for only such a little while that she had scarcely a decent dress to her back and not even a few shillings saved. She did not think of Shaun removing himself by marriage from the dependence and favour of his mother, and so making himself suddenly penniless for love of her.

He had no thought of how her people must regard him, a good-for-nothing blackguard to think of enticing

this little girl away from her people while she was still so young, and before she had time to make any decent return to them for their hard rearing of her. She had little brothers and sisters, one of them still an infant in arms, and how could she be thinking of doing anything for them while she was just about to go into the way of having a family of her own ?

But in this wild moment they were blind to all sensible thought beyond the great beauty of one another. Back of all their talking was just the faintest realisation that Mrs. Susan Heffernan had gone to Garradrimna, and that because of this they could remain talking here. And so they did until their course was quite clear before them. They would get married now. Oh, they would get married now. Great songs were bursting on their ears. Great silences. And the house was still, still because of something, a deed of stealth and silence, that had just been done upon it. There was no one else about the place at all. The men had gone out into the fields to stumble about their work for the remainder of the day, or to lie at the back of the ditches, now that there was no possibility of the eye of Mrs. Susan Heffernan upon them in disconcerting vigilance. Arthur Heffernan was making his journey across the field and by the back-ways to Garradrimna, going thus stealthily so that the woman returning from doing her business might not see him. This offence against the honour and the breeding of the Heffernans did not greatly trouble him at the moment, for his whole consciousness was fired into a thirst which Garradrimna only could quench.

Suddenly, as he strode along behind the ditch, he saw Mrs. Susan Heffernan drive by. And there was something about her this evening which immensely pleased him. The trap was laden with parcels and luggage. There was a cheap sale on at Brannigan's for the occasion of the fair, and the sight of the

vanities of yesteryear filling all the fly-blown windows had conquered this woman from whom all comeliness was fast fading. He laughed as he saw this in bitter satire of all vanity, and remembered that his brother Michael had married this good-looking whipster from God-knows-where against his wish and without a penny fortune to her name. Look at the luck she had! Look at the pride and importance and ambition of her still! She would marry again if she got the chance. What! Aye, maybe some young fellow, too. Maybe Shaun Glynn, this aspiring lout that she had so lately made her manager and who had sold her grand cattle at the fair to-day. But he was putting a nail in Shaun's coffin. He had already done so by the course he was taking. He was doing a splendid and a fine thing in this realisation of himself. There was no hope of anything really fine until a man took himself properly into his own hands. Aye, that was a fact. The thirty pounds were safe in his breeches pocket. He watched, with a kind of diabolical glee almost consuming him, the fine woman walking the pony up the last hill that led to the big, splendid house of the Heffernans. Hubert Cassidy, the most reliable ruffian that had ever followed a plough, would be waiting there at the gate to tell his tale. He had instructed him well in the part he was to play. The old man was to rush hurriedly into the house and say that the mistress had returned before her expected time, and was just at the road gate. She would not think well of her faithful and chosen man if he were caught like this red-handed and still dallying in the parlour with Mary Galway. There was surely a hiding-place for a few minutes of a sudden, the room upstairs where the press was. In the moment of the confusion of their ecstasy the idea of flight was suddenly significant in its suggestiveness. Arthur Heffernan, seeing that the car and the woman had disappeared over the hill, knew that his faithful ally had already done this. The

man with the black revenge in his heart and the good money in his pocket was already bounding into Garradrimna to spend a lovely evening.

Hubert Cassidy had executed faithfully and successfully the first part of his duty. Now he was opening the gate for Mrs. Susan Heffernan, and telling her that she must have forgotten the few cash payments that were so urgent and she in such a hurry to do her business in Garradrimna. She would be more than surprised, of course, that he had not made his appearance to tell her first before she went to the town, but he was busy as usual minding her business. It was most unfortunate, so it was. But she would hurry with the payments now, of course, for there was no use in giving parties—narrow, begrudgeful, grasping parties—a chance to be talking and she such a fine, successful woman.

Arthur Heffernan was seeing all this so clearly as he took his first pint in Garradrimna. He was smirking and grinning to himself and counting the change of his pound that he had flung out with a great flourish upon the counter.

Mrs. Heffernan, a little confused by her feelings of how the world always throws one down from one's bit of enjoyment, had passed into the kitchen, only to find Mary still confused by everything, trying to fix her hair before the mirror that was hanging against the wall near the fireplace. In the moment of their vain realisation the pitiful littleness of the women was apparent to each other. A kind of unspeakable anger seemed to spring into their hearts. Mrs. Susan Heffernan flounced upstairs. . . . Shaun, in his hiding-place in the high room where the press was, heard her coming, and not because he was afraid, but because of the confusion that was on him too, the

weakness, as it were, succeeding his recent ecstasy, jumped out of the window, leaving the marks behind him of a sudden retreat as he went. Mrs. Heffernan, her suspicions immediately aroused, rushed to the press, and there finding the money gone, went to the window and saw Shaun slipping away from the house through the undergrowth. The suspicion flashed into life immediately. Shaun Glynn that she thought so much of, Shaun Glynn that she had so greatly trusted to be her right-hand man. Shaun Glynn that she. . . . She stood frozen at the window. . . . But immediately she was wise. . . . She would say nothing. . . . It was a hard blow, but she would watch and be cautious.

She developed an anxiety out of which grew a mood of spitefulness, a mood in which her one consuming desire was to be revenged upon one of her own kind because of all that was fickle to her mind in the other, all that had just been hurried out upon such a wild blast of disappointment through her mind. Her conduct in the kitchen was the last little spark sufficient to inflame the mind of Mary Galway. If there was any lingering chance that some turn of regret for their decision might have come that hope was gone now. It was well that they were going to be married to-morrow, and that she was leaving here to-night.

When they came down from the chapel next morning, of a certainty, in the words of the old people, all was life before them. But there seemed little else before them, for they had not a penny in the world. They wandered out the road that they had come in. It seemed that they were just walking back quietly into their old ways. They did not seem to have thought of anything. Oh yes, Mary Galway had. She was firmly resolved never to spend another day working for Mrs. Susan Heffernan. Of course, he was bringing her into his house with his mother. She was a little afraid

as she thought of this, a mother-in-law. But when she looked at the new, bright ring upon her finger a fine pride welled up to sustain her.

Why, wasn't she a married woman now, and wasn't this fine man walking so proudly by her side her own husband, her own man who would cherish and defend her? There was a less clear definition of thought in the mind of Shaun in this moment. He felt, as it were, just foolishly glad that he had won this girl. She was his. His thought did not extend beyond his sense of possession. They were walking a bright road that was swept alternately with rich waves of sunlight and bird-song. . . . They were passing the house of Mrs. Susan Heffernan now. . . . She was upstairs in the window watching them. . . . She had her own wild thoughts to herself as they went by. It welled into her consciousness for the first time this full realisation of what Shaun Glynn had done to her, the great offence against her that he had committed. How mean he made her feel in her strong desire of him. And how she hated him now for being a fool in spurning her love. Look at him now without a penny in the world nor a place to put in his head, but with this good-looking, useless whipster hanging on his arm! And to think he might have had herself, a fine woman still, and all the lovely land of the Heffernans. . . . He passed on, and her cruelty was stirred to its uttermost when she saw the girl he had just married taking an affectionate look up into his face.

Yes, yes, she would do it. The people might only be inclined to whisper around that she was fond of him, if she let this pass. And besides it would be most unfair to herself and to the memory of Michael Heffernan.

They were hard by the door of his mother's house, but the whisper had already reached the proud woman of what had happened. The postman or someone else hurrying early out of Garradrimna had let fall the bitterest word that had ever been spoken to her ears. The news that her son had married a sort of a servant-

girl out of Michael Heffernan's house! She came to the door and her anger rose high to sustain her. She might suffer most bitterly for this a little later on, but now she was a fierce woman in her pride. She spoke words of savage anger that were altogether bereft of pity, and there was no light of kindliness in her eyes as her quivering lips closed finally upon the last thing she had to say. She put her hand in her pocket, and taking therefrom a coin flung it almost murderously at her son. She cursed him away.

This was part of the eternal bitterness that sprang out of the land, and as Shaun turned away from his mother's door he knew that this casting-out was final as anything could be. He had been given the angry shilling by his mother, but he had Mary. Defeat was not already upon them, and why should it be and they in the greatest day of their lives. Still they were strong. She, too, had courage, although neither she nor her man had a place to rest their bones on their wedding-day. Her own people might not look so unkindly. Shaun was a fine, strapping fellow who could work for her. . . . So they turned westward now to meet the road which led from Garradrimna to Castleconnor, without passing through Garradrimna out of which they had just come. While they walked as it were from disaster to disaster it was almost pitifully along a road of morning. But the hard word was before them even here too. There seemed to be blowing around the magic of their souls a bad, black wind. When her mother saw this daughter of hers, to whom she had given good looks, coming along the road like any streel all her anger was stirred. Because she had done the same herself, suffering poverty all her days because of it, she hated to see it beginning to happen all over again. She called in her man from the garden where he had been doggedly digging. Their action was swift and direct. The mother of Mary Galway

lifted the besom which she had in her hand and attempted to strike her daughter. Her father moved menacingly towards Shaun with the spade uplifted. . . . And as they turned away from here it fully appeared that both were in a sense outlawed for what they had done, and both felt that they had nothing else left save themselves and what they meant to one another in all the richness and splendour of love. Yet the lonely desolation of their great love was not so far from them now. It was an awful, inexplicable thing which almost stilled their hearts, and yet they took the road almost gaily again. Already was their love intensified. They passed now along one of the grey stretches of road which fringed the bog of Ballycullen, and for the moment surely they appeared as small, shrinking figures moving beneath the lofty and bright wonder of the sky. The significance of the merciless world stood starkly about them, and they moved so meekly before it, so soundlessly, yet with the ecstasy that was in them so richly in harmony with life. There was a kind of music about them as they went on. . . . They clung to one another and kissed each other, and it seemed somehow that they would live forever, would never part company with one another, and would be always young. It was good to be alive. It was fair like the morning. . . .

The day was moving towards noon, and in spite of all the loving tenderness with which the spirit of one might wrap the spirit of the other the first pangs of disillusionment and defeat were creeping in with the first pangs of hunger. They who, in spite maybe of humble ways, had been used to the regular kindliness of houses could not suddenly adjust themselves to this condition of immediate sacrifice for sake of love. For the first time since ever they had met their eyes seemed to stray away from one another in pain, and now to become fixed upon a figure approaching from the direction of Garra-

drimna. It came wildly against the wild background of the bog. It was Arthur Heffernan mistaking his right road and hurrying this way raging drunk. He somehow looked huge and powerful, and of account in the world, as he came along with his rakish stride. Instantly he seemed to fill all their vision with a new significance that held some suggestion of imminent disaster. He bore down upon them and fell into the ditch as he stopped. He shook his hand at them threateningly, and then uttered a big mouthful of curses. Then he seemed to become shrewd and cunning even in his drunkenness.

" Is it here yous are and is it possible that it's in the middle of the public gaze on the public road yous are and not hiding or anything. So yous don't know what's after happening. There was thirty pounds robbed from the house last night, and, glory be to God, everything goes to point the suspicion your way, though it's a marvel how yous could have had the heart to do it. But sure everything and everyone is saying the same thing. Where did yous get the money to get married ? There's a great flurrock on the peelers, for my brother's faggot of a wife, the Lord have mercy on him and forgive him for ever being married to her, is after swearing an information or something at the barracks. And of course yous are suspected. Now, why the hell were yous in such a hurry to get married ? D'ye see, that's what gave the show away entirely ? "

They were stunned as the words choked Shaun's throat, and Mary clung to him feebly. This seemed to be the first moment in which they were beaten, and the lonely crisis of their lives was upon them. It was crushing in from a sudden gloom that had fallen upon all the fields around. There was that old, almost obscene man swaying in his strong drunkenness as he stood before them. It was easy to see what had happened to the money if one liked to say it. But the afflicted

always find it hard to get credit for their story. The net was well-gathered in around them. Oh, very well indeed. It was pitiful. They would not be believed, and it surely seemed as if the whole world was against them.

Even the very strong source of their love seemed to weaken and break within them. There rose a great darkness before their eyes from which they seemed to wish to flee far and forever. The old man stood there still swaying in his drunken laughter as he saw them move quietly away. . . .

They got away from the road along which the sergeant and his men might now pass in search of them at any moment. It seemed that many others in search of them might, a great crowd, come down any road of the world at all and that they must get far into the fields. At last, well hidden in deep woods where there was water falling from stone to stone, they tried to think while their minds were burning. Where would they go now, if not into some town with the few shillings that Shaun had, to live in a little room and find work somewhere, as he had momentarily purposed. Although they clung to one another they had some strange turn of wandering thought for something beyond themselves. Surely they had some duty to the family, the family of either of them, that both must have forgotten. The family. The disgrace that this thing would be to theirs was a sore torment to them now. And yet because of love and in the name of love they were together now. They were surely hungry by this time. But there were heavy crab-apples, hanging above them. They shook the tree, and having scattered some fell to eating. There was something in this wild sweetness which seemed, momentarily, to become a part of the wild sweetness of their love. Their souls flowed out in happy glances of their golden eyes. . . . And sweeter

than the apples' sweetness was still the kisses of their lips. . . .

And as the shadows began to creep out over them from the bog the thoughts of their souls flowed out in rich, harmonious murmurs. And it was only when the wind blew cold in little, lonely gusts that thoughts of the big world, from which they had fled with only their love, crushed in upon them towards a more rude awakening.

So distressful a thing, of its very nature, is torment that by turns it would appear that they had done a fine thing, done an ill thing. And still the thoughts of the family would not leave them in the most fluttered moments of their fear and love, for they so fiercely wanted to keep their love and yet see that the families of both were spared the disgrace which must surely fall should they be discovered alive. Their mothers were very near them now, in spite of their efforts to break away from the life that had perhaps shaped even the wondrous longing of their souls for one another, two kindly women bending down to succour their infant helplessness. And to think that both these women must be weeping now, crying wild thoughts, maybe, because their ears could not hide the cry that the world around them was already making about their children.

To-morrow they would go further into the bog, where there were deeper hiding-places. But immediately sad thoughts would come to spoil even the hope of a thought of this kind. Bog-berries were sweeter, after all, than the sweetest crab-apples. And their love was agrowing sweeter now that each had tasted the richest deeps of the pools of sweetness. Lynchehaun had hidden long and successfully in a bog. . . . They might never be able to find them until some piece of God-sent luck would cause the truth to be told about the money, and then that all might yet

be well. And their glad and comely love would not be dying meanwhile.

Next day they went on and on and the day after that on and on again. The sun seeemd to die in sudden splendour upon each succeeding day. Their hearts grew weaker, but not their love. That flame burned to lift them brightly beyond all dying, while this world faded as something fleeing very far away. It often appeared as if it were the world that was beating its retreat from them, and again that they were fugitives hurrying away from the world.

But the end they were destined to make was the saddest that had ever been known to come to any even wild love-match in this part of the earth. For on the tenth day some sportsman wandering over an unfrequented part of the bog found them dead and cold, but still locked in one another's arms.

They were buried in the same grave in Garradrimna churchyard and on the same day, while her people and his people lamented loudly as they were put down into the clay. Oh, if only they had not been so blind and bitter ! And what was there in life after all that was in anyway grand only the love of a young, fine man for a girl that was young and comely ? It would have represented a rich and fine addition to life, this marriage of theirs, if only they had been allowed to live. But now only this newly-filled grave, the heavy remembrance of which must be forever heavy on the hearts of all.

It was said that Mrs. Susan Heffernan paid all the expenses of the fine funeral of the two, one loved and one hated by her, who had loved one another greatly and unto death. And as soon as the news of their lonely ending amid the brown silence of the bog had been established in Garradrimna, Arthur Heffernan had stumbled home drunkenly to his dead brother's wife with the true story of the money, and asked her for God's sake to put him out on the road again.

. . . . . .

It was only at a time like the present when some marriage was about to be made which stood in a way for a defeat of love that men remembered what had happened to Shaun Glynn and Mary Galway, but, because of the things the fields were always telling, those who were anxious to talk far into the quiet evenings about the marriage that was about to be would never say anything that was fine or brave upon the side of love, but would take instead the side of those who could buy even love because of their share in the fields of Dheel.

THE SECOND REFLECTION

CHAPTER I

Breedh was married. Indeed, she would seem to have been already a great while folded into the life of Dheel. She had accepted her fate with what degree of successful resignation the future years might tell. It seemed ages and ages now, as they said, and this, too, she herself felt full well, since she had been going to school with Seumas Darcy and Oliver Moyles and Fanny Soraghan. . . . Now, as if to recall a few to a sense of time here amid the timeless fields, the word was going around that Fanny was coming home from America. Seumas Darcy, naturally, was the first to know of it, but he did not seem to realise to the full what it meant to him until he heard the news in every mouth as common property. . . . She was coming home, his Fanny darling was coming home. How many years at all was it since she had gone away—three, five, ten years? She had sailed over the wide ocean and wandered in foreign lands. God only knew what lonely battles she had had to fight, but he, her "love," as she called him in all her letters, had not moved far, only out of the shop in Castleconnor where he had served his time to Ryan's of Ballyscurlock. He had done nothing at all really only dream of her, and turn oldish and mean through drink. The dreamer in him had been fulfilled in the drunkard he was so rapidly becoming. It was drink, and not love at all, that had brought many burning images before his mind. . . . And during the days when her homecoming was imminent there was only one reason why she burned more and more clearly before his eyes. . . . He talked over the news with Oliver Moyles one evening, when Ryan's and all it held was only as a wild, dancing cloud

about his mind. Oliver, almost all the passion of disappointment simmered from him with the passage of time, tried to speak as kindly as he could :

" Now, won't it be grand for you and she coming home like this. Sure, with whatever little money she is sure to have saved from her labour out there in the States you'll mebbe be able to get a little place of your own, and settle down independent like 'ithout nobody such as Ryan to say as much as a word to you for evermore ? "

Seumas stared down into the gathering hell of his mind. He felt all clearly how very keenly disappointed with him she must be. And very meanly was his mind already struggling for some excuse he would have to make, so that he might remain bearable to his own eyes at the moment of parting which he felt must come. He said a thing now which sounded almost dirty here in this dirty place :

" I wonder how many Yanks she's after putting through her hands in all this time. Our pious, lovely girls from Ireland don't be learning to behave out there."

" Now, that's a quare thing for you to be saying, Seumas Darcy. Don't you know damn well in your heart that she's after being very faithful and true to you, not like my lassie that took a figario to marry a madman. Maybe, after all, America is a kindlier, sweeter country at heart than this of ours for all our praying and our holy goodness. Somehow I think they manage to preserve there always what we know only as long as we are young. . . . Is it Fanny, indeed ? Look at the way she's kept replying to your letters with such loving devotion down through all the years."

" Ah, I dunno the hell ! It was hard to make out her romancing in many a letter. There's often she made me think that it was Ireland she was in love with and devil a haporth else at all. Always blathering she'd be in almost every letter about the green fields

and the hills and valleys of old Ireland. I suppose I used to encourage her foolishness, may God forgive me! For often, d'ye see, I'd work in a bit of a poetic description out of *The Emerald*, or one of *The Family Herald* novels, and she'd take it, of course, as being native to myself in my description of Holy Ireland in some of its lovelier aspects."

"The heart of the poor exile becomes strangely changed, and it's something wonderful how fond a person gets of Ireland when they're away from it."

"Begad, it must. But here I am myself up to my neck in old Ireland, as you might say, from one end of the year to th'other, and when I want fine language to give out my opinion of it, by the way, it's often to shoneen writers of England I have to go."

Oliver took a deep gulp of his pint, not wishing to encourage Seumas further in his queer, mad argument by any show of interest. A degree of difference between the two men here sharply manifested itself in a flash. Seumas was the windy, loquacious Irishman who, removed even this little distance from the clay, had gathered insincerity into his mind. Oliver was now the fully realised man of the clay who, whatever mean or fine thing he might do, was still more nearly himself in primal relation to his normal destiny. If his courtship of Breedh Growney had bound his mind somewhat firmly to all the kindlier facts of the land her marriage to Eugene Gavacan had somehow emancipated one side of his mind, as if to permit the other to dwell more darkly upon thoughts that were as black as water in the bog beyond Ballycullen. It had the effect, too, of turning him the long way across the fields and into Ballyscurlock to find comfort there on many an evening. But it was very curious altogether, to be sure, the way any mother's son would sometimes go.

The almost perpetually placid life of Dheel was vastly excited by the reported homecoming of Fanny

Soraghan. It seemed no time at all, as they said, since she had gone to America, but they knew that a very few years were often sufficient to work wonders in the life of a young girl. They had clear remembrance of many a returned Yank in the shape of a female. . . . There would be the first few days of idle gadding about to rise up much envy amongst the neighbours, much turning of their minds' eyes upon America, which would be intensified with each fresh exhibition of silks and fineries upon the part of the one who had come rambling home. Yet, strangely enough, it might all be intended as a means of making an alliance with some fairly comfortable marriageable farmer upon whom the girl and the girl's people had set their minds, a pathetic, gorgeous means of effecting entrance to the dull life of a farmer's kitchen after the delights of America she must have known. And in the end success, perhaps, in this poor effort of attainment, all of which seemed a pitiful, dark ending to a few years of bright life and the gaily-contrived splendour of the homecoming, this return to the life from which she had seemed to have escaped with her youth to a little pleasure in one of the gay cities of the world, a complete return it would almost seem, yet no such girl had ever fully returned to the same life upon the very same level. Anyhow, she would have managed to marry some man who had a little more land than her own father, and this stood for victory over the fields. Yet all the few pounds she had scraped at such cost out of the scramble of America would have won her only to a certain slavery, which must very soon blot all colour of America from her real being. But there would be her memories, a few photos in the huge American trunk she had brought home, to remind her of the grand fellows she had met at Knights of Columbus dances in New York city. One by one the silk dresses remaining in the trunk would decline into dresses remade for the children.

Maybe she would cry a little while she ripped them up for this purpose in the lonely nights. . . . Yet, strangely enough, when succeeding Yankee girls returned, their magnificent front, for a short while at least, remained undefeated in the near presence of the women around them. The usual display was something which their people expected of them, so they did it dutifully. . . . .

On the evening that Fanny Soraghan was driven home from Castleconnor station one of these little periods of exultation was inaugurated. It leaped into being almost in spite of anything she might do. Men and women, all those who in any sense could call themselves neighbours, came over the fields of Dheel to bid her welcome home. The little kitchen was crowded, and there sat Fanny in the very middle of them all, very correct and grand in her blue blouse of flowered silk and neat, well-tailored costume, looking curiously out of place for the moment against the dark background of the sooty hob behind the turf fire. Especially as she told in her loud American way of all the grandeur she had felt and seen. Now and then her gold-filled teeth would flash and shine in the turf-light glow.

" Gee, I had some time ! "

" Look at that now ! America must be a fine country ! "

Then another welcomer would enter with the woman or the man.

" An', Fanny, my sweet *gartla*, how are you at all ? "

" Guess I'm just feeling swell. And how are you old people ? "

" Well, well, and isn't it yourself that grew up into a fine, lovely lump of a gerrl, and musha, the Lord save us all, sure it's well I remember the day you were christened taking you in my arms, and d'ye know now what I'm going for to tell you. . . ."

The harangue was cut short, in this its beginning, by

Fanny's mother, who said loudly, so that everyone in the whole kitchen might hear, so much fine pride was in her tones as she commanded her younger daughter :

" Jane Ann, dear, go up into the room and get the lovely jewel-case that's lying on the bed, and show these neighbours of ours all the glittering diamonds and golden rings your poor sister is after bringing home with her from America."

The little hush of expectation that fell before the exhibition and then the wonderment :

" There now for you ! "

" Look at that now ! "

" Oh, lawsey me ! "

For what seemed an age to Fanny their eyes stared eagerly upon the bits of concentrated light which the things in the case made until at last their exclamations of amazement died down into mutterings amongst themselves. Fanny was growing weary of it all, of this acting of the part of the fine lady as she sat here very small in her own mind beneath the poor roof of her father after long years. For it was only of an imaginary splendour that all this told which had been as far from her in America as it now was from those who sat around her. . . . Besides the reality of this place to which she had returned was already crushing in. It was gradually moving more closely with the disappearance of one of the quarts of whiskey she had brought with her to treat the neighbours. Her father had already called her aside and whispered her not to be so foolish as to let them see the other one or they would never go. And whom d'ye think he was expecting, he said, only two choice friends who had appointed to come at a special hour, Andy Giveney, no less, and his old friend, James Moyles. . . . One by one the others drifted out with loud " Good-nights ! " and the two fine men he was expecting, came in to make a night of it all for themselves ! Her sisters had gone into the room to gloat and gab over the fineries that

Fanny had brought with her all the way from America in the big trunk.

Old Andy by way of making a start spat into the red ashes and said :

" Begad, America must be a cursed great country entirely, and Ireland would be every bit as fine if we could weed out forever the very last of these curse of Crumwell landlords."

The conversation immediately turned more intimately and thus into nearer relation to the land :

" I suppose you'll be thinking of getting Fanny settled now," said James Moyles to Peter Soraghan with a shrewd show of disinterestedness and a watery gleam in his eye.

" Aye," said Peter, " we hope to, with the help of God."

The fiery mind of Andy Giveney sprang into immediate interest, although this was a kind of twist out of the accustomed turn of his monomania.

" D'ye know what it is ? " he said. " I believe that that counter jumper in at Ryan's of Ballyscurlock, Shameen Darcy, is never tired of telling decent people that Fanny used to write to him from America constant."

" Well, sure, begad, they were childer together, and I suppose we can't be pussy with them for having a few thoughts of one another, and Shameen, bad luck to him, was a promising bit of a lad once upon a time."

" Oh, the drunken idiot. I'm sure, Peter, you'd never think of giving your lovely, American daughter to the like of that fellow. Sure, he'd never be able to keep her even in middling poor poverty itself, so he wouldn't, and very soon it'd come to appear that what he'd be after marrying her for, in spite of all his grand talk and all his romancing out of *The Emerald*, was whatever bit of money she's after bringing with her from the States to make her of some service to the rest of the family."

" Well, begorras, you needn't be looking at it so

serious, Andy, all of a sudden, and it's not your affair at all. But all the same, you may take it from me that I'd sooner drive her in disgrace from the door than see her marrying him."

"Good man. Throw it there, my old seggocioner! Well spoken, my old son. Begad, yes! What! But, of course, as you say, you'll be contriving to marry her to someone. Eh? And what about James Moyles's son here, Oliver, a fine butt of a man for any girl. And sure they were childer together as well. Mebbe the both of yous here could do worse. What?"

"Aye begad!"

"Begad aye!"

"Good health!"

"Here's fortune!"

"D'ye know, it takes me, so it does, to put a plan or a concoction or a bit of devilment on foot?" said Andy, with a wheeze of commendation as he lit his short, black pipe, and began to suck at it. The two other men began almost immediately to move into their discourse concerning the settlement of the young people.

In the room Fanny was growing more and more weary of the gabble of her mother and sisters.

"Isn't that gorgeous?"

"Now, isn't that exquisite?"

"She'll be the belle of the whole country in that."

"There isn't a lad in the seven parishes but'll be breaking his heart after her."

There was not much that could bring her comfort in this tiresome kind of talk. It was the talk that women always make when they come together. It made her feel that Ireland, after all, was just like any other place in the world where a woman has to live. And to think of the way he had painted it and the way she had seen it painted in his letters. . . . She was very tired now, but to-morrow she would be seeing him. To-morrow she would be seeing Seumas Darcy.

CHAPTER II

Next day Fanny went out " most magnificent into the gaze of the public," as her mother put it at her setting forth. She was arrayed in one of the very best of the dresses she had brought home, with another blouse which was almost of the pattern of gaudy wall-paper. She felt almost shy of appearing in it, but her mother said she looked lovely out and out. Tess, the sister who was younger by several years than Jane Ann, in fact the very youngest, and so the pet of the family, held her hand and trotted on her little fat legs to keep up with " her grand American sister," as she went down the road. . . . It was easy, surely, to have looked fine in her mother's eyes, for would not the slightest adornment be rich in the eyes of that broken faded woman who spent her days in the hardest labour, dressed just as a woman should be, at any age at all, who had to do the hard work of the land.

Perhaps some thought in this connection was crossing the mind of Fanny, for she was but vaguely attentive to the chatter of her little sister as she went down the road, and until they came to the half-forgotten gate which was the entrance to the boreen leading up to the crab-tree orchard. Then Tess said :

" Look it, Fanny, there's the grandest, big, big crabs up there that ever you seen. I was there a Saturday, so I was. Would you like jelly ? "

Ah, dear-a-dear ! Remembrance immediately rushed in upon her, a wide, shining flood. She was back again in the days when she had wandered in young gladness here with Oliver Moyles and Breedh Growney and Seumas Darcy, sometimes with even wicked Anthony Duffy who had thrown the little birds out of their nests

on that day so long ago. She remembered, too, how Eugene Gavacan, the queer *gom*, had come just once or twice, but he was a companion of the dances rather than of those younger days upon which her mind was now all so brightly. Yet her thought moved of a sudden into other years of her life as she felt again the fear, the almost sense of loathing, with which she had been filled whenever Eugene had asked her to have a dance with him, an invitation she had always managed to refuse. And now to think that Breedh, the gentlest, quietest little creature she had ever known, either here or in any other place, had been married, aye, married quite a long while, to big, rough, mad Eugene. The news had appeared all the more painful to her, perhaps, since it had reached her in one of the blotted, laborious scrawls which came infrequently from her mother. It struck her with a sense of pitiful amazement, becoming chilled gradually into acceptance by a sense of its fatefulness. It seemed to reach out so darkly, and yet with such unquestionable truth and reality, from the dream country of which Seumas Darcy's letters continually told. There was surely nothing romantic in this ending to the love of her childhood comrade. Oliver Moyles and poor little Breedh had always seemed so fully intended for one another from the very first. Indeed, it had quite seemed that nothing save marriage could possibly happen between them. Ah, dear-a-dear! And it had resulted only through the land in what must have been such bitter, bitter disappointment for both. Oliver, in spite of his born strength, the endless black cruelty of the fields, the hard, constant battle of his way of life, could not have found it in his heart to be anything save kind to little Breedh. And now Breedh was married to Eugene Gavacan, that great hulk of ignorance, and he having the seed of madness in him as well. Life was such a queer, sad old thing! The orchard of the shining crab trees had once been, as it

must now be to her sister, a scene of innocent delight welling gladness greatly into the mind whenever it was entered. She did not want to see it ever again for fear some treachery of life should have entered there, too, out of all life's cruelty. She clasped the hand of little Tess more firmly and hurried on. Around her now were the grazing fields of Dheel, so long strangers to the plough. Empty, empty were they, surely, yet full of a strange pageantry all their own. It was something not quite unseen, yet a thing which one could not quite see, the sudden moments when the grass bent coyly down while the kiss of the sun was given. Then one almost saw a great, green bed of lovers kissing, kissing, yet, of a sudden, only vanishing streaks of light running fugitively up to the hills. . . . It was grand to be coming upon old, well-remembered trees still alive and proud, some tall, well-bred, and stately, others burly and dogged as a farmer of any part of Meath. There was a flow of green and gold beyond the trees that melted her very heart. The inmost soul of her was moved, and her eyes felt the warm darkness of tears.

Her soul seemed to sob her consciousness into a blind anger, for when she looked and saw the fields again it was almost with different eyes of another being. And it was because she had wandered far away from them that she was looking like this upon the fields of Dheel. For she had seen the sea. Her eyes had gazed sadly over the great waste of waters that from the beginning of the world has been of such power and significance in the lives of men. Her poor little thought had fluttered away before its immensity, and she had cried and cried. . . .

And even so now again, in what should be a moment of triumph for her, she felt utterly broken as she gazed out upon the immensity of the fields. And she felt in her heart that the fields were like the sea, for they

had broken many a beautiful life, ended many a dream, smothered many a singing voice. And although one might look for treachery in the cold, wet heart of the sea, it was different in this case, for the land was like a mother, the earth-mother, as it was sometimes regarded, and who could ever think of treachery in the heart of a mother? It was something even greater, and those who sprang from it leant upon its breast in the full belief of love, like John upon the breast of Jesus. But Fanny was crying now because it was so fully possible for this thing to be treacherous, crying for all that the land had caused her to lose in the years that were gone, all that it might cause her to lose in the years to be.

Yet was it no sudden thought of beauty that crushed in, but rather an intense feeling of the hard life of the fields. She had been taught a great deal about life since she had played here as a child, much that her memories of the moment made poignant. . . . Strange was it, indeed, that she should be remembering, beyond all else, so clearly the day that the imported herd of Colonel Montagu Marlay had chased her with the other children out of the crab-tree orchard, the talk of old Andy Giveney that night, which was his talk always of anything that moved out of the malevolence of Colonel Montagu Marlay. The terrible way in which they used to curse the breed of that man!

The first glimmerings of what she was now remembering had begun to become part of her life on the morning she had gone away in the grey dawn to Queenstown, far away from her own people and from Seumas Darcy whom she loved, a poor, timid little girl, to face the world. Then there was her voyage over, one wild sob like the sob of the sea. Upon her arrival in Boston the feeling that came to her was one of being just stunned by the cold strangeness of everything so suddenly around her. But even worse was still to

arise, the swift desolation of the dream of her aunt's wealth that had come to be embodied in such permanency from her earliest infancy. How well she remembered the words in which it had been shaped before her mind always :

" In a year or so, Fansheen alanna, we'll be sending you out to your magnificent, wealthy aunt in Boston, and it's coming back you'll be in a year or two after that rowling in wealth and able to do grandly for yourself and your little sisters. Indeed, then, it's the powerful, fine future that's before you surely."

And now, scene upon scene, was she passing through the future that had come to her. There was her aunt's mean, little house upon the outskirts of Boston, and all the swift disillusion that had come to her there. At home in Dheel this woman's man had been pictured almost as a millionaire, but she soon saw him for what he really was, a defeated, little fellow who moved shiftily in and out of the house. The mean grind of this house was sorely depressing, for all it was pictured in Dheel as a palace full of ease. The job she got as a quick-lunch waitress in Tremont Street stood in her mind now, almost like a bit of a life that was separate and self-contained. As people of an alien and distinct country were the Americans who had come there for their food, their loud, ugly way of addressing her which seemed incapable of ever shaping a love-word or a compliment. Then the noise and the smell, two things between them which lent peculiarity and distinction to the quality of all this almost other life through which she had passed. There was over all, to her mind now, a sense of the feverish rush of an existence that has lost all the dignity of leisure, a pitiful realisation of her failure to acquiesce in a glamour whose meaning she was unable to understand.

Her mind seemed to alight with a laugh upon the brightest spot in all her memory. It was the happy

time that a company of actors from Ireland had taken to visiting the restaurant, and how they had at once shown a liking for her because she, too, was from Ireland, and whenever they came to the place would sit only at the tables which she attended. She remembered the names and the faces of them, oh, so clearly —Mr. Keegan, Mr. O'Connor, Mr. Cleary, and Mr. Conway — Mr. Henry Conway, whom she best remembered. The others had told her that Henry Conway was a writer as well as being an actor, that he was just earning a living by playing parts until such time as his writing would bring him a better way of life. Oh, dear, she remembered him so well, a tall, dark young man who would gaze up at her from where he leaned his elbows upon the table with a look of wistful inquiry. . . . All four of them were men seemingly of fine intelligence and education. Her Ireland seemed all so different when seen through the eyes of them. All around, in the Irish-American circle within which she had begun to move, Ireland was seen less clearly than even she herself had been able to see it. The American sons of Irishmen who had been driven from the land would often come and ask her to tell them of Ireland. They had never seen the green, blessed fields, nor might they ever see them. Yet had they succeeded in striking some tender chord within her breast, the same, perhaps, that had first been struck so long ago in the broken gardens of the crab-tree orchard. . . . There fell always sadness amid the garish gaieties of the Knights of Columbus. It had reminded her curiously of the talk of old Andy Giveney, the way the smartest young men would be always dwelling upon the past. And she had seen all over again a Land League meeting at home in a Saint Patrick's Day parade of the Irish Societies, the dark, fierce heads of her countrymen all bowed in angry sadness beneath the green banners which floated above them. . . .

It was queer that her momentary thought of the gardens had flashed all this through her mind while her little sister was tugging at her hand and trotting beside her to keep up with her proud stride before the neighbours. . . . But still she was seeing the face of the young actor, who had hoped to be an author some day, looking at her as it were through the trees of Dheel. On a night he had not been playing he had taken her to see one of the Irish plays, and as she sat by his side in one of the grandest theatres of Boston he had told her of his hope and pride and of his great ambition. It must be grand, she had thought then, to know and to feel all that was wonderful and beautiful in the world so well that one should wish to write it down for the delight of others.

It seemed such a great while now since he had asked her to be his wife, just one night after he had taken his supper, and as she stood in a vacant moment by his side in the quick-lunch restaurant in Tremont Street. Her words of refusal, too, how deeply they were written upon her recollection :

" Ah, dear no, Mr. Conway. Is it poor little me and a grand, accomplished young man like you. Sure, it's what I have a boy in Ireland, so I have, and indeed it would be very unfaithful of me if I went away with you now. Musha, mebbe it's what you'd get tired of me, too, in a very little while, and all you know about girls. Mebbe it's what I'd only spoil your great plans and great hopes, too. Now, isn't it curious that the boy I have is a kind of a writer, too. You'll laugh, I suppose, but mebbe it's what the inclination to writers was in me always. He's only a shop-boy back home in Ballyscurlock, but it's something surprising in a young fellow that never got much schooling to see the lovely letters he writes. I'll show you a bit of one of them that I have stuck here inside my blouse and then you can see for yourself."

Then she had shown him, in a recent letter from Seumas in Ireland, the last page where he always broke into "a kind of lovely poetry." Mr. Conway had laughed just a quiet little laugh as he handed her back the letter. . . . And it was this scene by the table, and all that had gone to make it, which now remained with her most clearly of all that had happened in her life before this moment. . . . Just this little memory which would not go out of her mind, but beyond it no unfaithfulness surely to Seumas Darcy.

And now her every thought had a lovelier colour than the colour of the fields. To think that she was going to see him again. If what Mr. Conway had spoken of her beauty were true, then surely she was beautiful still, comely for him, in spite of all she had endured so that she might be able to bring herself back near to him. It displayed, even to herself, a remarkable tenacity of purpose, how she had stuck to that one single job until she had at length become manageress of the whole restaurant. From living with her aunt at first she had won to the complete independence of a furnished room. Often as she came in tired in the evening of a long, hard day she would stand there before the mirror, in the artificial dusk which flowed in from the street lamps, fingering a letter of Seumas's, maybe stuck far down in her pocket, which she touched affectionately with warm, nervous fingers as it made her remember. And the mirror would hold her face for a great while, a little, painful sea within this troubled dusk. She was snatching what she could from the fierce claws of America, and surely it was not easy. She wore daily the mere livery of the poor but respectable girl, a navy-blue costume always, it would almost seem, the same navy-blue costume, more suitable, maybe, to the surroundings of Dheel than to this well-dressed place, so that she might be able to save sufficient to return with grand clothes some day to Dheel and her own people and Seumas.

It was with the same end in view that she bought shiny jewellery out of a shop-window in Washington Street, and hoarded it as a dazzling collection of priceless gems with which she yet hoped to express her pride before the world, this " world," in spite of all the rich spaciousness around her, being still signified to her mind by the one word—Dheel. She sent money home to her mother three times a year and saved as best she could so as to have a fortune of two hundred pounds when she returned to the fields. *A fortune of two hundred pounds.* But it could not be all triumph and everything happening just as she wanted it to happen. The little mirror in the American dusk could tell of her many heart-breaking defeats and her ageing with them. . . .

And now after all that, after all the pain she had shown in her face to the mirror in the dusk, it was queer to think that the brightest spot in all her memory had not brought her enduring gladness. The crab-tree orchard ! Ah, goodness me ! She clasped the hand of Tess more firmly and hurried on as if in fear. . . . They were now at the turn near Doolan's forge, and coming towards them was a young man leading a horse. Her heart fluttered with expectation as to whether or not she would know him. Oh yes, of course she would. The years that had passed now seemed never to have been. The young man was looking at her with a sheepish, good-natured grin from beneath his faded felt hat. He stopped and said :

" And, musha, how are ye, Fanny ? "

Just for a moment of confusion she felt unable to recognise him.

" Say, is it Oliver Moyles ? "

" Begad it is, the very one."

They went full into the eyes of one another now. He looked big and ungainly there in his patched, every-day clothes, with his big, red, hard hands. He was unshaven, unkempt, coarsened, almost driven beyond

recognition by the few years that had passed. God, it was cruel how everything and everyone could be so sadly changed by a few short years! Look at the way she was changed, the grand clothes and the gold watch itself pinned outside against the breast of her shirt-waist, but what about the look in her eyes? Even if he had gone to America to become a mere unskilled labourer doing the hardest work, he must surely have been able to appear, in intervals of translation between the long hours of his dirt and labour, very gallant indeed in a little round hat, an indigo-blue serge suit, with wide pants and hugely shouldered coat. Now it must be always this way with him, heavy of gait and heavy of look, and with all his proud manhood hidden here in this quiet place. Even the very words of warm greeting came so awkwardly to his tongue.

"It's a fine day, so it is. How are ye at all? When did ye come home? Be hell, you're a long time away, Fanny, and that's a fact. Musha, d'ye ever remember when we were going to school together. Aye, and d'ye remember when we used to be gathering the crabs together in the orchard?"

"With Breedh and all."

"Aye, indeed, with Breedh, sure enough. I suppose you heard some splink of an account out there in America of how she's after getting married on me to Eugene Gavacan, the madman."

"I was sorry to hear that, Oliver, sure I was."

"Breedh was young and sweet and you going away. Now she's married to Eugene Gavacan, the big clown!"

There was no reserve here, no politeness, none of the veneer at all which the most loutish from Ireland had soon learned to acquire in the States as a little gaudy garment at all times agreeable to women. The emotion from which it sprang was bare before her eyes, yet for all that it rose up a fine feeling of kindliness in her. After all was it not just as pitiful that a man should be

robbed of his love as that a girl should have hers broken or snatched away. Her thought of Seumas grew more intense as she stood by the side of Oliver. Tess was not listening to their talk at all, but was gazing instead into one wine-dark eye of the horse. Yet so swift is a woman's thought, seeing that she thinks with her heart, that very soon was she falling out of sympathy with him while her eyes were putting on a wistful gaze as if in pursuit of Seumas, while her face was warming almost into that look which it might wear as she kissed her lover again.

"The devil to him anyway!"

The expression recalled her to the face of Oliver, whose turn it was now to put on the look of wistfulness which hers had worn. He gazed out over the trackless fields, those lonely, brutal stretches of the earth which had caught his life to their life. There was scarcely a field that he could see now in which he had not laboured somehow, sometime, giving of his best in some wild, futile courtship of the land, helping to lend it the beauty which was its summer smile. And what had the land bestowed by way of return? It had given him a living, but it had taken from him the one life, the one beauty which had sprung from its womb before his very eyes, and which he had hoped to win by showing his love for the land. His eyes seemed to open wide in the anger of a fondness which was unfilled. And then a tear rolled heavily down his cheek. In an acute instant the lovely day was clouded around that little leaden brightness falling, falling before the eyes of Fanny. . . . Instantly she thought she knew, in some way that lay deep beneath the dark power of the land, why Breedh Growney had married Eugene Gavacan, the madman. Maybe Breedh, too, had once seen Oliver crying. . . .

Yet when Oliver spoke again his voice was unbroken and strong.

"God's truth, this'll be a proud day for Seumas!"

" Our other old comrade. God knows, sure, I'm dying down dead to lay my eyes on him."

There was a great amount of concern in her tones as she said this, and the Yankee speech of her seemed suddenly broken. Her words now had the kindly ring which was surely one of the sweetest tones in all the variously modulated voice of the fields. Yet the immense cruelty of the same life was immediately apparent. Oliver opened his mouth in a broad grin :

" Poor Seumas ! Oh, aye, poor Seumas ! "

He said no more, but continued his grin as he began to move away without the slightest attempt at politeness. He made the noise with his tongue which called the horse to attention, and went on down the road. Fanny was left with all her thoughts fluttering in confusion. She could not so suddenly understand this life she had left, or return immediately to its ways. . . . Tess looked up at her in sympathy, the way of the child always, a certain pitiful wonder commingling with her own helplessness. It was so essentially a touch of womanhood even this way of a little girl. . . . They went on in silence.

Now they were moving out of the loneliest stretch of the road and coming upon those signs of population which begin to appear in the vicinity of a village. There were small farms with trim cottages and pretty gardens. Here there was evidence of an anxious concentration in the direction of the desire of people everywhere and always for their neighbours' goodwill, but the expression of it was in a way which did not strike so soon or so subtly at self-respect. This exhibition of rivalry was healthy and made for comfort and cleanliness. It was something, too, which quelled the spirit of envy in the passer-by and raised up instead a certain praiseworthy Christian admiration. Here and there were cottages newly-built, with children playing around them, and which Fanny did not remember to have seen. How

fast new waves of life rose up around one ? But it was grand to think of that all the same, little children playing around new, clean houses with geraniums in the windows. Full of pleasure she looked again and saw with her woman's home-loving eye neat curtains behind the clean glass, showing that the women of the houses, whoever they might be, were good women. How much finer it was in truth to be one of these women, with middling poor clothes maybe, but a full heart, than herself in all her gorgeous, meaningless American finery. But these people of the cottages had not much land, and according to the code in which her whole being acquiesced the land was everything. Coming nearer the village was another aspect of all these things. She saw the utter desolation, the almost drunken decrepitude, of what must once have been a gracious house. She saw the broken, branchless trees in the orchard, and they reminded her curiously of broken birds by the roadside when some sudden desolation is past. Here appeared a puzzling, pitiful aspect of agrarian triumph, even if it did not fully explain itself to her mind. An attainment to the comfort of these possessions, and then the sudden affliction of a condition not native to their breeding, and the contiguity of Ballyscurlock, had succeeded in bringing the present appearance upon this once decent place. The family of the Fitzgeralds had been ruined by drink. Soon the place would be put up for auction, and some saving, industrious labourer, or a younger son of some farmer, would buy it, and, having worked it back to its original comeliness, it might return in the second generation to its present condition through power of the same afflictions. . . . Tess caused an almost tiresome tugging at her hand as she gazed back a little frightened at the sadness of the place. . . . The weedy, untended garden, the mortar crumbling from the wet walls.

Now she was meeting people driving out of Bally-

scurlock, after transacting their morning business, the idle sons and daughters of "strong" farmers or declining "gentlemen." For directly opposite reasons both looked at her long and inquiringly, that is, they stared at her. Her clothes and the sudden Sunday grandeur of her on the week-day road provoked this exhibition of curiosity. . . . Here, too, was a further aspect of the life of the fields. The few men on the street and lounging by the doors looked at her curiously, disquietingly, but she passed on, head erect and with a fine stride, for this was the moment which stood for success or failure in accordance with the expectations of her people. She had a moment almost of faintness as she came by the door of Ryan's. She was glad of even the means of escape from the burning stare of Ballyscurlock, so she entered the shop. . . . Mrs. Ryan, her puzzled look of the first glance struggling, as soon as it might, into a businesslike beam, leaned across the counter to welcome her. The little girl, Tess, was sufficient explanation of the "lady's" identity. There was an awkward moment after the usual commonplaces of greeting had left nothing to talk about. . . . In the poisonous presence of this inquisitive woman a sudden qualm of self-respect brought a feeling almost of affright to Fanny. . . . There must be an immediate excuse for her presence here. . . . Oh, yes. Some chocolates for Tess. A whole big box of chocolates for Tess. . . . This, with the little gabble which surrounded the purchase, eased the situation somewhat, until Ryan himself came in. He made Fanny welcome, and, producing a bottle of port wine and some biscuits, proceeded to "treat" her. . . . She nervously sipped the wine, and took the biscuits in the tiniest little bites. Her thoughts, one by one, were falling into fear. Not a sign of Seumas Darcy could she see, although here surely was the place he worked in.

There were people passing in and out of the shop

before all of whom she was evidently expected to cut a figure of some distinction on her first day at home, and to speak with a pronounced American accent. This she seemed to do now with as much impressiveness as the confusion of her mind would permit. It was in a way such a mean climax to all her expectations, the untidy, smelly shop, the peering inquisitive people, her little, poorly-dressed sister holding her by the hand. . . .

Ryan said suddenly aloud upon some customer making an inquiry in a whisper:

"I wonder where the devil is that idle, drunken, good-for-nothing whelp?"

Seumas Darcy now hurried in, it would almost seem from nowhere. He had evidently become aware of Fanny's presence here, and had gone to tidy himself. As he moved up behind the counter his face was blushing scarlet. His appearance smote her with sudden pain, for he had the look of one had already been defeated, defeated by himself rather than by life, which is the greatest sadness. And here at last, in this guise, was the man upon whom she had set her heart through all the years. Her eyes were fixed upon him in wild quest of rapture. . . . But there before her was his greasy waistcoat almost reflecting her anxious face so quickly puzzling with disappointment, his ragged moustache evidently left untrained and untrimmed to hide his decaying, discoloured front teeth. Indeed, it was easy to see what his life must have been here all the time she used to be thinking of him in lonely, distant Boston. . . . There was an immense silence suddenly about her. . . . It was well-known to everybody, through the publicity of the post-office, that she had been foolish enough to keep up a correspondence with this fellow all through the length of her stay in America, so now, with a great effort to accomplish the decent thing by the girl, if not by their employe, Seumas, Ryan

and the wife struggled out of the shop. There was a certain privacy now in which they could lean across the counter and speak to one another. Several of Ryan's best customers waited around, cursing impatiently.

"Man dear, you're looking grand, Fanny!"

"And you're still here in this old place, Seumas. I thought surely that you'd have risen to a job in Castleconnor, or have a shop of your own by this time. It's queer that you wouldn't have thought of me even as much as that."

As he leant over the counter there it appeared suddenly as if her speech had unnerved him, and his elbow slipping over the counter, he almost fell down upon his face.

"Oh, I'm stuck here for eternity, Fanny, and it's the devil's life!"

He seemed to her monstrously coarse as he spoke these words, although they were uttered almost beneath his breath. A loud, sneering voice now broke the stillness. It was that of Shamesey Golligher, who had wandered over here from Garradrimna to drink the day:

"Musha, Shameen, my sweet fellow, why don't you give her out some of the grand speeches you learned off by heart out of *The Emerald*?"

There was a regular volley of laughter then, one or two waiting until the others had relieved themselves to laugh quietly, yet in a way which brought more hurt to her soul. The quietness, the almost gentle kindliness of it, brought remembrance to her mind of another laugh that she must remember for ever. It was when Mr. Conway had laughed in the restaurant in Tremont Street while she showed him the portion of the letter from this man, then so greatly magnified by separation, but now shrivelling smaller and smaller before her mind from moment to moment. . . . She saw with the

starkest clearness how she had been fooled. He was a liar and a deceiver, too, with nothing of his own in him that was really fine at all. He had merely been copying paragraphs from love-stories in *The Emerald*, and sending them as writings of his own. Even the grand verse he had once sent her was maybe the work of someone else. Indeed, it was no wonder that Mr. Conway had laughed, laughed even as he went out of her life, and left her to her foolishness. And to think that she had refused that grand, gifted man for this thing. . . . Her very mind began to tremble with torment.

Somehow, beyond the loving foolishness of all the letters, but maybe only because of them, she had imagined him working for her, a young man full of life and love and hope, as she had seen him on that last night at the dance before her going-away. But now to look at him ! Why, he was the worse of drink at this very moment. He was a disgrace. That was the best word, the country word, to describe him. . . . She hated him firmly to the very roots of her soul now and for evermore. Her mind was hurried by her passion into a cold and cloudy night. The scalding tears must rush from her blinding eyes if she remained another moment looking at his face. . . . She pulled Tess almost roughly away from the counter, and hurried out without a word to anyone. Outside the door she thought she saw the child looking up into her face, fancied she heard her saying :

" Oh, Fanny, you never bought me anything at all in the shop only the sweets, and my mother to say to me and she making me come with you that you had a lot of money to spend on us all after you coming from America."

CHAPTER III

As Fanny came blindly out of Ballyscurlock the thoughts that welled into her mind were even as those she had had on the sad morning she had gone this way to America. She felt now, even as then, that something which had been beautiful in her life was being lost to her for evermore. The fields of Dheel had somehow gone to shape all the thoughts which had influenced her life, and so, too, had Seumas Darcy. . . . Although her eyes were cast downward she did not see the road. She was blinded by torment, too, to the beauty of the hedgerows at this, the noontide of summer. All that warm young life, how very sweet it was. The white skin of the round, soft face of Tess with her violet eyes and scarlet lips, were richly in keeping with the colour and quality of early summer's roadside splendour. Not so the face of her who had faded in a hard, far city for sake of the fields, for sake of him, and who had already entered lonely the winter of the soul. . . .

Yet in spite of the desolation through which she had just passed her mind was turning, almost in spite of her, towards hope and gladness again, for it was seeking now another way of return to her youth. There was Breedh Growney, the wife now of Eugene Gavacan, whom she had not yet seen. Breedh had not been at the " spree " in her father's house last night. Perhaps because they had been loth to ask her, she now being the wife of a rich man, into one of the middling poor houses of Dheel. Yet Fanny could not think at all that she would have been too proud to come had she been invited in all good nature and neighbourliness. For in distant Boston she had seen greater grandeur raised around all that a young woman may mean to a man

or to many men than anything that had ever been achieved amid the fields of Dheel, even when a poor girl had been forced to marry a rich man for his money.

They had turned down a by-road from the one that led back into Dheel. This was the road of the elms, and was the shortest way from Ballyscurlock to Garradrimna. As they went down the hill they had a view of the fairly poor country around the little lakes of the valley, the bits of ragged farms, the low, crooked houses. The whole countryside seemed to wear such an air of joylessness even in the bright day. . . . Yet the hope that had sprung into the mind of Fanny would not be conquered by all this, which was forcing itself into her consciousness after the fashion of a powerful ally of the circumstances of torment through which she had just passed. . . . But her mind was rising, rising still. As they continued down towards the valley and round a turn of the hill she had the first glimpse, after long years, of the rich, fine place of Eugene Gavacan, set, as it were, high in splendour above all the little houses and little farms of Dheel.

Whisking Tess by the hand Fanny now crossed a low stone wall and took a path which led straight across the fields to where the house of Breedh Growney's man was set so solidly amid a clump of sycamore trees. They passed through a field where newly-shorn ewes were still with their lambs. The lambs had passed out of the pretty innocent stage, and now and then a young, lusty ram, out of sheer wantonness, would hurry head downwards across a short space of the field and butt with his strong head the now shrunken udder of the mother sheep. "Ah, dear-a-dear!" sighed Fanny, as she thought of all the cruelty which her sex must endure, the penalty of the gift of love. . . . But it was grand to be walking through the fields once more; they made a velvet softness, a carpet of delight to her feet, after the hard streets of Boston. The last time she

had walked through the fields of these parts was upon one night of a dance at one of the little houses, not very long before she went away. Ah, my goodness me! And that night Seumas Darcy had kissed her. To think that she had let him kiss her!

Already they were arrived, by the back of the house, in the yard of Eugene Gavacan's place. It had an immediate sense of well-being and spaciousness, even though its quality had been shaped out of the narrow life of the fields. There were all kinds of expensive farming gear scattered about promiscuously, yet everything seemed to fit into its place as an expression of the solid comfort of the man who owned it.

But the mistress of all this fine place had not yet lifted herself proudly above the life of the land, for there she was now feeding fowl from a wooden dish held against her hip like a woman living in some year of plenty in the Bible. She lavishly scattered last harvest's hard, heavy grain, and the fowl made an eager fluttering around her as they pecked it from the floor. Her back was turned to Fanny, as the visitor entered the yard almost playfully on tiptoe, and her eyes wandered momentarily to the road up which two men were going. It was the parish priest of Castleconnor and Ballyscurlock riding on horseback away from the house of one of the "snuggest" men in the parish, immensely pleased after a very pleasant visit. He slapped the broad back of Eugene Gavacan as he went, and Eugene in turn dug his huge fist into the ribs of the horse as if to emphasise the point of some joke that was passing between them. . . . At last she looked no more in that concerned, wifely way, for Fanny had stolen to her side.

"Musha, Breedh, you poor thing!"

"Fanny, Lord save us, Fanny, and is it yourself that is in it at all?"

They embraced then; tears welled into their eyes,

and they became almost passionate in their welcoming to one another's arms.

"Come on in!" said Breedh. "Musha, I used to be often thinking of you, and that's as sure as you're there."

"And, surely, Breedh, you never imagined that I had forgotten the dances and the laughs we used to have and everything. . . . You're married?"

"I am, God knows, and sure it's often I'd be thinking that you'd married some great swell out there in the States, a multy-millionaire mebbe! I had always a notion, Fanny, that you'd marry a swell."

"Musha, I didn't then, and came rambling home to you 'ithout any man at all. But you, Breedh, sure you were always lucky. It's a great match you got. How's himself?"

Fanny's voice trembled a little as she spoke thus inquisitively, putting the question which cut like a lightning flash against the background of Breedh's life. Her eyelids flickered a little nervously as she saw Breedh's look fall downwards; she felt sorry as she saw the hand that wore the gold wedding-ring play nervously upon the decanter out of which she was about to be offered a drink of entertainment. As the moment flickered into another she heard the clink of the gold marriage-ring against the glass, but it made a sound that was distressed, unmusical. It caused a further chill to hurry through her. The face of Tess was turned away, for her eyes were searching for an invisible bee which buzzed continuously against the window-pane outside. Another moment had flickered in, and she had seen her own face in the gorgeous, big mirror behind Breedh. A different sensation flashed through her consciousness, a sense of shock this time, through which her whole being fell. She thought that she looked remarkably old here in this fine, substantial room, even in spite of her new dress, but had she not

passed through a sudden and brimful hell of sorrow. There had been, maybe, in Jamesey Ryan's shop, a brutal tearing-off of the mask she had worn since her return, and, as if to add fuel to her burning thought, Breedh raised her fine, dark head now. But if she had sorrowed her sorrow had only made her more beautiful. Her dark hair fell back in rich waves from a forehead that was arched most nobly. Tess had turned around vacantly, and was now gazing out almost tearfully between the two. Their eyes were caught in her gaze. . . . Their tongues, suddenly unloosed from their sorrow, struggled into the usual chatter of women. Fanny had refused the wine, although the rich sunlight pouring through the window, beyond which the bee was buzzing, shot the colour of amber through what was in the decanter, making this small allure to shine greatly amid the drabness that had fallen upon the comfortable room.

It was to be tea then, Breedh going into the kitchen to make the preparations. While she was away Fanny's eyes were drawn to the objects upon the big square table on the middle of the floor, the books that were never read, and a few photographs, one of Breedh and her man taken just after they were married and on the honeymoon in Dublin. She was frightened a little as she looked at this photograph.

Eugene had grown a beard since the old days of the dances. It gave him a wild look, as of an evil face with narrow eyes peering out through a clump of furze, the real madman's leer. And poor Breedh looked so pretty standing by his side, as she reposed her hand upon one of his great, square shoulders where he sat lumpishly in his chair, his big hands spread out upon his knees, and a feeling of complete possession in the solidity of his pose. . . . There fell a greater silence in and around Fanny as she gazed upon this picture. The buzzing of the bee at the pane had been replaced

by the sound of the glad summer wind rustling the heavy trees outside, while, curiously, it seemed a moment for great sadness. . . . Tess had come close to Fanny, and tears were welling into her little eyes as she gazed too, upon the photograph, which, she thought, must be the cause of her sister's silence, and that sad, quiet look in her eyes. Feeling upon her cheek the little, warm breath that was now almost withheld in fear Fanny turned about, and just at that moment Tess looked with such grand compassion into her eyes. Fanny caught her little sister tightly to her breast and warmly kissed her wild, frightened face. The whole little being of Tess flowed suddenly into a kind of rapture that was apparent even through the whinge that she had set up, for this was the first moment since the gorgeous return that her grand American sister had really appeared as her sister at all. Some ray of gladness was reflected in the tearful eyes of both. . . .

Breedh, looking very quiet, now came into the room to make some further preparations for the tea. With the ordinary procedure of the preparations something commonplace fell down immediately upon their hushed mood of exaltation. Their chatter gradually drooped down and down, although the imprint of their whole lives had been laid upon one another in the flickering moments of their intercourse that had already passed.

Yet there remained a great kindliness in their intimacy, a fine sympathy which flowed into a common bond. And perhaps for some reason that was unknown, or else because Breedh was married and Fanny remained still unmarried, their talk began to be of the bonds which unite men and women. They talked about all the marriages that had taken place within the nest of fields since Fanny had gone away. And it was fine to hear Breedh talking, with such splendid verve did she enter into the conversation and cause her curiosity to extend down many a byeway, although she did not seem fully to realise why.

With almost startling rapidity did they begin to assume a new relation in regard to the things they were saying. They became as wondering spectators of many a dark yet noble tragedy wherein poor women had gone down into the dust with their youth and beauty and all their power to love. And little Tess, because she had not yet felt the scorch of love, stood farther away, and so heard most clearly and saw most clearly. She had already read many a love story in *The Emerald*, or *The Shamrock*, or some stray English weekly. But the stories in these papers which came to Dheel had, every one of them, the same happy endings, and there did not seem to be anything happy at all in the things that this married woman had to tell her grand sister Fanny. . . . Half-dreaming, she seemed to stand ever farther away and all their talk to shape itself into a third quality, the form of a story just as she might see it printed in a paper. And the story of Ellen Hynes rising clearly out of all their shapeless gabble was very sad indeed.

. . . . . .

Sometimes, in the evenings, she would come out of the dark house at the end of the boreen, as if to give to the world a glimpse of her glory. For at twilight time the little world of Dheel was beautiful, and as she stood there in the soft light her own beauty would commingle richly with all the beauty around her. . . . Her hair was the colour of the quiet night already beginning to creep down the long, narrow road between the hills. Her skin was white as the bog blossoms, still bright through the darkness, for this is the cleanest white that man may know. Her eyes were as mystic pools which drowned both dark and light.

In Dheel they called her "Lovely Ellen," and her beauty had made her the queen of this poor. lonely

place. She had come here as a child, no one knowing through what rich descent she had sprung so rarely. Some, now almost middle-aged men, who were come to admire her foolishly had petted and fondled her as a child, and the young men, who were all fallen in love with her, had played with her along the same road to school. So great is the power of beauty to move men even in such a dark, dejected place that the very smallest things came somehow to be touched by the light of gladness that her beauty made. Sometimes the touches were not altogether of light. Men had been known to neglect their farms for weeks just because Lovely Ellen had slighted them at a dance.

The small, poor house out from which she moved to her triumphs was so gloomy and quiet always—there was no one there but an old man and an old woman now almost stilled by the years. Old Shaun and Maura, who, although of her own kin, seemed almost to belong to some other kind, so very ancient had they grown with the years. The petulance of age was upon them, and they were always lamenting loudly over the life that was slipping from them, so it did not seem strange that Lovely Ellen should be anxious at all times to be moving from this house and snatching at some queenly assertion of her youth and pride. . . . Sometimes it came to her, a chill horror in the thought always, that she would grow old before these two old things were gone from this place, and that the ending of all her great comeliness would be but three old things with bitter tongues on them living here alone. . . . But the power of her beauty, a rich gift surely, would always flash magical at a dance, while the eyes of all the heavy-footed swains of Dheel would be wild upon her. Her very beauty was its own strong protection. And how could a fine, lovely girl like her ever come to grow old? There were some who often went so far as to say that even were Ellen married and the man to die

on her of a sudden, while she was broken from the work of bearing the big young family crying at her heels, many a fine man she had spurned in her pride would be only too glad to come most meekly again and ask her to marry him.

Yet there were a great many who found it hard to imagine marriage as a condition for Lovely Ellen. Even after all the striving of all of them to find favour, how could any man have the final courage to consider himself worthy? There was scarcely one who, although he was ready almost to take his brother's life the next minute for her sake, would not willingly sacrifice the claims of affection for very love of her next minute again if this could only place her beyond the defeat of age or any other calamity in some kindly place of velvet dusk and many coloured roses, and which would be filled always to rich delight with the wonder of sound that his dream had made for her. . . . But there was the world always crashing down in its gray, ugly tumults about every dream, for the world had ever been at war with all those things like Lovely Ellen's beauty, which held a promise of immortality.

It might be said that the power of Ellen in Dheel was developed with the events which it created. Already men had been known to turn to drink and lose their farms because they could not find favour in her eyes. Yet, still, Ellen remained unmarried. There was an amount of beautiful self-sacrifice to be seen in the way she went on attending the old pair, old Shaun and Maura; and this seemed to stand as an atonement for every action of her other nature. Yet still there were many worried mothers of strong sons fallen beneath her proud influence who often went the length of saying that Lovely Ellen was a woman of the evil eye. But it was strange, and a thing that could not be altogether forgotten, how she would always return from a night of triumph for her dark beauty to

the kind and charitable offices of the little house. She would not leave these two poor old things in their helplessness, although she might drive men to madness and her beauty might fade.

Then Lovely Ellen fell in love. It seemed the strangest thing that she should do so—she who had made so many sigh, and all of whom she had treated, after such a short season of bliss for them to the scorn, the flashing, glorious scorn of her eyes. He was one of the poorest boys in Dheel, but he had a comely brow, and his character was expressed in high achievements on the hurling field. They would have made a proud pair, surely, coming out of the chapel to begin the world with no greater possessions than their own strength and youth and love. And now all the light waywardness of Ellen seemed to vanish with this discovery of her heart, yet, although not strangely, her charm only seemed to kindle the brighter in the eyes of men. And this, although it had been said by the wise ones, that, as sure as day, if ever her mind came to settle upon one, it was good-bye, and maybe all for the best, too, to the power of Ellen in the place. But now this miracle had happened to twist out of shape every prophecy regarding her. Yet prophecies, for all the show of wisdom they may hold, are based only upon things that people can see, and there was many a man still who felt in his secret heart that he could almost murder some other for love of her. But all these notions were as wild thoughts of a momentary night, and flickered out because of their own very intensity. Michael, whom she had chosen, had been always a popular figure amongst them anyhow. His hurling had brought the glory of championship to Dheel. . . . But their very attachment seemed of itself to signify an ending, something that stood as a sudden abridgement, of the disquieting existence of Lovely Ellen.

Yet it was only in one man, in the sullen mind of

Maurice Henry, that a passionate desire seemed to stir darkly towards intention. He was a man of power and importance in Dheel, who should have had what he wanted just for the asking. Had he not the finest farm in the place, of which any girl should be proud and thankful to be given the chance of being mistress? And he had asked Ellen, only to be refused for Michael Lacy, a lad who had not a penny to his name. Indeed, there were a great many who thought it very foolish of Ellen. . . . Thus, through the very unselfish regard of her heart, might hurry in the final punishment of her life.

Since the eyes of the great beauty of Dheel had fallen upon him with favour, Michael Lacy was as a man strangely uplifted. He walked with a prouder step amongst his fellows; he swung his *caman* with surer force in the field. For she would be looking at him always in the moments of his pride, and so the ancient, primeval feeling of the hero was enkindled within him. When the field of combat would ring with cheering as he shot the goal, which was just needed to maintain the reputation that he had won to Dheel, he would feel somehow in the midst of all the excitement that the small effort of her voice had gone to build up that great sound of greeting, and inevitably as he had made the goal his eyes would seek the place where she stood excited, rapturous, proud. Later they would be seen moving out of the field together, a fine couple surely. But the eye of Maurice Henry would be upon them shrewdly, meanly, spitefully.

Then a most terrible thing happened one dark Sunday. It was the day of the final match for the County Championship, and the game was being played in Garradrimna. The pair had gone over there full of gladness after first Mass in the morning. On such a day as this Michael always appeared at his best, and proved he was the grandest hurler that the county had

ever bred. She would be a proud girl this day as she stood watching him, and listening in gladness to the cheers that he would raise from the great crowd. . . . Yet it would, in a way, be only as a preliminary to something of finer gladness to her mind. But this was his last game, and many thoughts would run through her mind as she stood watching him. They were to be married early in the following week, and he had promised Ellen that he would give up hurling and settle down. He was coming into the little place with the few pounds that he had saved. It might not be a very wonderful life they would have to all outward seeming, but they had talked it over and were now well content to embrace it together.

The game, a hotly-contested one, was in progress, and at half-time the scores of Dheel and of Dowlan, the opposing team, stood even. The second half would surely see a moment of triumph for Michael Lacy. For with the instinct almost of the actor he always saved himself for a great moment towards the end. The Dowlan team was flagging, and the second half-hour was nearly closing, but they had played a better game than any team had ever played against Dheel. Yet neither side had yet been able to force a decision. But now Michael Lacy bore down upon the ball. . . . There came the hush upon the throng on the side-lines which always fell around the man of supremacy in the moment of his event. . . . There was not one but felt that no power on earth could prevent Seumas scoring the goal which would win the match and bring the County Championship again to Dheel. But the Dowlan men, with a great resumption of effort, were evidently fighting it to the last. There came an unexpected scrummage in midfield. Somehow Michael did not seem to hit the ball, but was seen to fall to the ground instead. The great sound of victory which should now be almost filling the world beyond the field

had become monstrously stilled into a long gasp of horror. . . . Michael Lacy was bleeding upon the ground. He was dying, and it took him nearly ten minutes to die. It was terrible to see that strong man so suddenly cut away from life by one terrible blow. . . .

And Lovely Ellen saw him die. Crying wildly she broke through the solid, stricken crowd, and, throwing herself down in anguish, kissed the blood-bedabbled face. . . . It was another most pitiful thing to see that proud head being brought to such a depth of sorrow. . . .

After the death of the man she had chosen the poor, quiet life of Dheel claimed Ellen again for its own. That sudden crush of anguish had merely intensified her beauty. Her great eyes now looked out with a far wonder from her white, sad face, and the old gladsome Lovely Ellen with the light laugh and the kindling look was no more. There were many who said that she would never be able to forget Michael, and that it was in a convent she would end her days. . . .

Then, almost in the one day, the old couple that she had come to lean upon in her sorrow flickered out of life, and she was left altogether alone. . . . She felt, too, that she could never go again to the dances or to any of the little bright places that had known her. She would be seeing his face before her always, with the red blood clotting amongst the fair, curly hair. . . .

Now, Maurice Henry began to loom of greater significance in her life than ever before. This was his moment. Dressed in his best at all times of every week-day, he would walk past the door, or take opportunities of meeting her as she came from Mass or went into the town, but she would pass him coldly. He would send presents to her of turf and sticks and potatoes, so that he might win her favour, but she would never even satisfy him by a word of thankful acceptance, or even return them with a curt message of refusal, which might in its way have been some satisfaction.

And knowing all this quite well, the neighbours who surrounded her, and were at no time far away, thought it all the more strange that she should have at last surrendered so quietly and married Maurice Henry one summer morning in the little chapel of Dheel. But the great wedding that he had planned never happened, for, as the grand carriage passed the little cottage, where she had lived lonely for so long, she sprang out and rushing into the poor place, remained there, crying bitterly, and no one could get her to move from it either by persuasion or by threat. It was the most hopeless and sorry ending that had ever happened to a wedding in these parts, and there was no one could explain the puzzle in any other way than by thinking that, as she passed the cottage, some madness, perhaps inexplicable to herself, had taken possession of the mind of Ellen Hynes. Some sudden thought, maybe, out of a childhood memory of the distant days when she had begun to move from this place in all her conquering, yet perhaps tragic, beauty. And now this ending, this blind and wayward deed of sorrow which seemed to stand in itself as a negation and a betrayal of all her soul. What good could come of it—what hope? A lovely woman crying wildly through joyless days and sleepless nights. For many a thing she had done could be excused as coming out of the wildness of youth, but not this, which was merely as something sinful and wicked, an offence against her own life as well as against those means by which men strive to snatch some comeliness to their lives.

The people of Dheel had never much respect or love for Maurice Henry. His wealth stood for something over which kindliness could not make a bridge towards regard either in their hearts or his. Now, in addition to lovelessness they could feel for him a certain scorn. And in the course of his afflictions, as is only natural with all humans, the best qualities of the man began

to emerge. In the persistence of his efforts to make Ellen return to him began to appear an amount of unselfish and pure affection. The defeat of his efforts drove him only to a further failure. He even went so far as to come for her several times, driving over formally in his high gig, but she would never show the slightest inclination to accompany him back to the fine house she had never entered, with all its comforts, and it was said that she now got it hard enough to keep herself alive in this place. All her relatives, to the most distant degree of blood, and in fact everyone who might be expected to have any influence with her, reasoned with her to do the sensible thing, but all to no purpose. She would not leave ; she would not return. She was nearly an object of scandal, they said—a lone woman living by herself, and she after leaving her man. The neighbours, out of pity and curiosity, would often creep up to the door of nights and listen for sound of her within. They could always hear her singing old, sad songs to herself, as if in mourning for her beauty that had begun to fade. It was strange, after all, that for all its early splendour how her beauty had never come to its full flowering and had never gone out into the world upon the wings of pride.

Then, one day, as if in answer to the insistence of her thought, a man came out of the city that was so far away, and down all the lonely roads of the country, to the road that led past this little house. Just by sheer accident he stopped and came in for a drink. He had not thought that his vision would be held captive in a long moment of wonder. . . . After all his wandering he had found a rich place of dwelling for his soul in this poor place. He would paint her portrait, " A girl of Dheel," he would call it. And what a girl was she !

Immediately out of his gladness he spoke of his intention.

"But sure I am no girl now," she said, and there was almost a cry of desolation in her words. But with his eyes fixed upon her face in the pure delight of the artist, it was the girl of the painted portrait that he saw, a face so very young and beautiful, and when his portrait of her was painted it would hang in one of the great galleries of the world and it would be seen and said that he had realised his vision of beauty in the everlasting wonder of one woman's face. So he pitched his camp in Castleconnor, and came out the winding road between the hills to paint her as she stood there in the doorway. . . . There was great talk of this wonder in every place, and both women and men would foregather at eve to discuss it. A painter fellow was doing a picture of her now, but sure she put in for that kind of thing and nothing else when she left her man. It was not right, they said, and the story, greatly magnified, of course, was heard by Maurice Henry.

It was strange that this should happen now when he had almost managed to forget her to the extent of coming less often to ask her to return to him. But now it seemed that his pride and his manhood and his right in this woman, everything, had been questioned, offended, given, in the words of Dheel, a slap in the face. Every day he would creep across several fields with great secrecy, so that he might see this fellow talking to his wife. Once he heard the word "love" mentioned and it lashed his heavy, suspicious mind into a very fury of anger. It was not so wonderful that he had happened to hear this word mentioned, and not as a part of any feeling deserving jealous suspicion, for the talk of the man of art was of all that is lyrical and lovely. Ellen listened with the eagerness of one whose ears had been so long unfilled. This was the thing for which her life had yearned into its immortal longing. The love and beauty of which her painter

had spoken was the love and beauty of all spiritual things, and as she talked to him, for the first time in her life, her mind became lifted beyond thought of all mean things that fade and die. . . . And her image lived, day by day, into greater beauty upon the canvas through power of this man who had wandered, like a sound of music, across her life. She was happy now, but only, she knew full well, for such a little while.

Now her portrait was finished and soon would be sent away for the world to see, and this poet-painter who had done this perfect lyric, as it were, in praise of her beauty would yet be spoken of in the proud words due to one who had done a fine thing. The moment of farewell appeared so sadly as the end of all the happiness she had ever known. And as he went from the door and up the narrow road between the hills again she knew that this was the end, and the end. She must soon begin to droop down into old age in this desolate place, but maybe in some distant place of light and laughter and splendour the world would be stopping to look at the famous picture entitled "A Girl of Dheel," for it would be the portrait of "Lovely Ellen."

That very day a terrible thing struck the dumbness of terror into the very heart of Dheel. Maurice Henry, his whole being sped to this dreadful ecstacy, had waited behind the hedge down the road from the house with his double-barrelled gun, and, as he passed, had blown the brains out of the man who had been painting Ellen. The people of the place who had followed the little drama of her life, even to this last tragic act, with the certainty of appearance almost of the chorus in a Greek tragedy, had not been far away when it happened. It was a clear case of wilful murder against Maurice Henry.

And so, with what amazing suddenness, in the awful moment of one man's madness, a double avenue of escape had been opened up before Lovely Ellen.

In a last almost ghastly moment of clear consciousness, thought of the full, final freedom, for which all this catastrophe of her life seemed to stand, crushed in around her almost blindingly bright, yet full of sorrow. It was her loveliness that had fettered her, and no more would they be able to call her lovely. It was her beauty, which Fate, maybe, in addition to her own wilfulness, had prevented her giving to any man, that had brought her life to this affliction. The sound in her ears was that of many waters falling as her eyes flashed wild.

. . . . . .

It was late in the evening when all the telling was done; the sun was going down behind the hills that lay westward towards Castleconnor and Mullaghowen. Little Tess had grown weary of their talking, of looking at the pictures in the books upon the table, or at the photographs in the album, the old, old photographs of handsome women in tight bodices, their dark, shining hair parted in the middle and plastered down upon the sides of their heads. These women were all of the Gavacan family, and if one looked long and deeply one saw the queer glint in their eyes which sometimes lit up the face of Eugene Gavacan, tearing away, as a mask might be torn, the look which was his usual kindly foolish expression.

At length when the dusk had begun to flow into the room, and Tess could no longer see her own face for the crowd of shapes and shadows in the mirror, Eugene Gavacan came in sweating and tired from his work in the fields. He was not without a feeling which compelled hospitality. He made Fanny welcome, and was very kind to little Tess. . . . She was fascinated by his great, bushy beard. He made almost fearful grimaces, too, while speaking, even while saying kindly things.

His entry to the room had brought with it an ending to their talk of love. This was one reality of love, this man. It was immediately a different scene, a different house, a different life.

After a lapse into silence flowing out into a long, hard look at Breedh, he said to Fanny :

" Mebbe it was a pity that you came home so soon, for if you came a little later we might be after giving you a real family welcome, for then, d'ye see, there might 'a' been a little child here, a little youngster crawling and crying round on the floor."

It was his look at his wife as he said this rather than the word itself which stirred Fanny's disgust. And she felt because this had been spoken she could not stay here much longer. Thereafter it became a struggle to get away from the extreme friendliness of Eugene.

The talk, however, seemed to hold no interest for anyone, for there were great gaps of silence cut in succession by each member of the group, even when a remark would be addressed directly.

At length Breedh and Fanny stood together, out in the yard before the house, saying farewell. Tess had gone on out in front and was opening the road gate. But these women who clung to one another now were as younger children. . . . They clung to one another as they kissed and fondled almost as little sisters. The spire of Castleconnor Chapel could not now be seen from the door for a great billowing had begun to flow down from the tall woods of Garradrimna, and far over the low-lying fields. In the young, lush meadows a corncrake was making cry.

CHAPTER IV

There was a sense of sudden movement, of almost contrived eventfulness, about Fanny now which was surprising, indeed very disconcerting to her who felt that it must have some sinister significance, inasmuch as it was all so remote from the manner of the accustomed life of Dheel. A dance had already been organised in her honour, a dance in the Moyleses house. Old Moyles and his wife had hurried into Ryan's in the afternoon of this very day, and made a big purchase of the necessaries of entertainment. It was Seumas who attended them, and as the parcels became heaped upon the counter strange thoughts came to him out of the medley of his reading, out of poor love stories which became nearly literature now within the wild conflagration of his mind. It was a sad way, indeed, that he thought of the parcels—as heaped-up clay about the grave of his dream, his lost love. His dear departed Fanny! How very keen to his mind was their significance! But there could be only one meaning in the eagerness of the Moyleses to do the thing well. They were expending a good penny upon the materials for the "spree."

And well did Seumas know that it was for no casual reason they were doing this. Over the few pounds they might spend their eyes were fixed clearly upon the two hundred pounds at least that Fanny had brought with her from America. It was only a little while since she had left his presence, seemingly for ever, and already was the life of Dheel stretching out its horny hands to re-enfold her. Oliver Moyles was his friend, but it was only in the way of a few drinks, and maybe that was no friendship at all. He had seen much of such public-

house brotherliness passing before his eyes, and he knew what it meant, even though he was sometimes drawn into its enjoyment as the only source of pleasure that ever arose here. Oliver would, maybe, think nothing of playing the traitor to him. But it was not in this way that he might look upon it. It was something that would have happened through the contrivance of his father and mother, and so could not be viewed in the light of a deliberate act of his own. But it would be hard to look into the eyes of Oliver when he came here after the wedding. . . . James Moyles eyed him narrowly as he stumbled about behind the counter. It was curious that, past all the doggedness, beyond all the sapping of sentiment which the land had caused in him, the old man should have a little turn of sympathy for Seumas in the loss of his girl, which was the prospective and practically certain result for which he and his wife now stood here. Mary Anne, the woman, was different. Her feeling of the moment was expressed in the harsh ring of her voice as she gave her orders. This was a nice-looking cut of a mother's son indeed! The pride of Honora Darcy did not extend very far in him! The reputation of him and the appearance of him! She had no notion of the scene which had so recently been enacted here, but in her heart of hearts she knew that Fanny as a sensible girl, after doing her best for her people in America, would have nothing to do with Seumas Darcy. She had kept up a correspondence with him. Everybody knew that, but sure there might be less real "suitability" when all was said and done between two who wrote and talked of "love" through long, courting, moving years, than between two who never saw one another until the marriage morning.

How little and unnecessary did all the foolishness of affection appear to her who had knowledge of what a woman must do to fight the hard way of a mother

through the world? Love, indeed. Hah! It was nice to nurse a child when it was a weeshey, young thing, to kiss it, to fondle it tenderly, and to dandle it upon one's knee. . . . But to be mad about the father and to indulge in any idioting to make its father one man more than the other. Ah, no, not at all! Besides, wasn't Oliver Moyles, her own lovely boy, fit comrade for any girl? It would be very cheeky indeed of Fanny Soraghan to go set her mind upon any other, now that his father and mother had completely taken the notion of her into their minds.

The things were all ready now. Seamus had somehow endeavoured to procure them all from their various places of secretion in the shop striving his best to parcel them and set all out tidily after the fashion that he had learned during the three years of his life that he had spent "serving his time" in Castleconnor. He had done it in spite of much fumbling through blindness of regret, blindness of drink. He had totted up the bill, too, after many mistakes and frequent references to the number of parcels, many dippings of the pencil into his drink-spewn lips. Before either of them was quite sure of the amount Mary Anne Moyles had paid it with a fine flourish. Purchases of the necessaries of life might be marked by credit, but the materials for a "spree" were always paid for in cash in accordance with one of the most rigid codes of the fields. . . . Besides, her proud expectations of this turn-out were almost merging into reality. She was almost certain of being able to attain her purpose. There was fine earnest of her triumph in the present woe-begone appearance of Seumas Darcy. He was feeling it already, she thought, by the look of him! . . . James Moyles, her dutiful and quiet man, was carrying the parcels to the waiting cart outside the door. Their business here was nearly at an end. Shameen, as she thought of him in the diminutive term of belittlement,

looked as if he were shivering, and very soon must want another drink. She moved out the door, and on the threshold met James, who was coming into the shop to see was there anything else at all to be carried out. They began to speak in low whispers.

" Lookid, we ought to ask him, Mary Anne. Sure, after all, he's a Christian just like the rest of us ! "

" Is it him, to make a show of us mebbe, the disgrace, right foreninst everybody."

" But, sure, what harm can it do us and the fine plan we have only bettered, mebbe, by the comical kind of an unfortunate appearance he'd have on him before Fanny and all."

It took what was really the good nature of her man to flash the woman's subtlety, with full focus of vision, to most spiteful execution. Immediately she saw it differently. Oh, yes ! And she was suddenly anxious. Old Andy Giveney would be there, and, with a little priming, might be depended on to give, if it were still needed, a final twist to Seumas in the eyes of Fanny. She turned back into the shop now with a beaming look upon the poor, shrinking figure behind the counter :

" It's how we were nearly forgetting to give you an invite out to Dheel this evening to the bit of a dance we're giving in honour of Fanny Soraghan. Musha, it would be a queer thing if you weren't there after yous being friends nearly since yous were little childer."

When the dusk was beginning to flow in from the fields of Dheel, and about the time when Fanny was crossing home from the house of Eugene Gavacan, there were lights already in all the windows of Moyles's house. Coming up towards the house through the fields before the door one could see figures passing and repassing behind the lights. The pantomimic hurry was

suggestive of the clatter of preparations, although in the distance these of course were unheard. But now and then a little blast of music, the tuning of Willie Doolan's fiddle, flowed out and strayed far down the road. . . . Young men and older men, with clean shirts and collars and ties on them and their Sunday clothes and shiny polished boots, were standing in the darker shadows of the outhouses taking a smoke before going into the house for the night's diversion. Occasionally a loud, careless laugh rang out. Snatches of conversation could be heard. A humped, decrepit figure seemed to be the point of concentration for an eager discussion that might be just beginning to develop. A clear, young voice rang out in a sudden stacatto utterance :

" The devil a word of truth in it, I'd say, for you're sunk to the chin in villainy and lies, Andy Giveney, you mane old codger you ! "

In the kitchen, towards which one after another of the young men were turning away from the crumpled yet still wildly gesticulating figure of the ancient man, the girls of Dheel, the ecstatic virgins of this night of honour, were now in numbers almost fully assembled. They had caught Fanny on her way home, and hurrying her into her own house to deck herself out, tired and depressed as she was, had whisked her over here all in the space of half-an-hour or so. The two who stood in symbolic relation to the purpose of the evening now sat upon either side of the fire, Fanny herself and Willie Doolan, the fiddler. Fanny was arrayed in her very grandest dress now and wearing all the jewellery that she had shown to the neighbours on the night before. Here, surely, was there a further, determined effort to make it memorable and an appendage of wonder through this usage. It seemed of a sudden that this whole scene had been contrived to fittingly frame the splendour which it made about her. Some of the girls whispered to others, almost in tones of envy, that wasn't she very

like a queen and she sitting there? There were "diamonds" in her hair and "pearls" about her neck, and shiny, "gold" rings upon her fingers. The fiddler, too, was in his glory. The snow of the years surely fell lightly upon this man. In fact, he appeared younger than on the night before Fanny had gone away. And, indeed, it was only natural that this should be, seeing that he did not dwell in Dheel at all, but in some far place amid the fairer fields of his music's making. His smile was that of a man not very near the earth at all, and the way he gazed at one, made his eyes like deep wells of the very soul of the Gael. The young men coming in looked on this man with high glances of pride, for he somehow gave them courage that was so fine a feeling after the sense of black defeat, the only thing for which old Andy Giveney stood. Willie began to tap enticingly with his foot upon the clay floor as the sound he was making with the fiddle appeared at last to flow into a tune. . . . As a background to the pair a few old men were coughing and blinking by the fire. Later they would be spluttering and cursing as the dust of the dance got into their throats. It was no sort of place for them at all, but there was a sup stirring in friendship, and it was this that had brought them here. There was a loud hugger-mugger of women from the parlour, where tea was being prepared for all the guests. There was upon everyone a great effort to be gay. Every eye had swept the whole appearance of Fanny in examination, but she did not appear so happy sitting there, although the radiance of the event still left her looking as if she should be envied. . . . Gradually everything seemed to be shaping itself into another scene. . . . She was remembering so clearly, in all the corresponding aspects of this event, the night before she had gone away to America. That night had been a poor and sad one in her life, and yet it had possessed a certain quality which was strangely absent now, gone suddenly

out of her life forever, because something once great and dear had ebbed from her heart. It had broken from her and flashed far away, like a wounded bird of brightness falling down to its death, as she stood to-day by the counter in Ryan's. . . . There had been no pride about her on that other night, but what was it at all that had made her almost happy in her sadness? She knew that it was gone from her now. . . . Oliver Moyles, now shaved and dressed, and not looking so badly at all, came over to speak to her. . . . He spoke words which almost puzzled her until she remembered. Yes, of course. It was in the house of the Moyleses she was now. . . . Some sense of its meaning flashed into her consciousness and she almost guessed why she was here. . . . She struggled with herself for a moment. Then it gave her a certain joy to laugh and chat with Oliver there in the full gaze of them all. It could not be said that she was heartbroken anyway. Her eyes caught thankfully at the signs of industry and attainment in Oliver. He had certainly kept some grip upon himself, anyway, even although the clay had coarsened him in mind and in body. They went on talking as best they could, being now, because of her long exile, two whose minds could not soon pass on to the same plane, nor eddy into enjoyment upon the same thoughts.

About them already, a moment of their power springing out of the fields, almost it would seem from time immemorial, to encompass them, to spancel them together, was being neared. As the first batch to be entertained her father and mother, Oliver, herself, and Andy Giveney, were being called into the room. She made an excuse that she was time enough, and Oliver saying the same thing remained upon the other side of the fire. . . . The conversation had become very difficult, for now the first dance of the night was beginning to whirl round and round. . . . It passed as a kind of phantasy before her eyes, making a sense of wistfulness to flow into her

mind. . . . Her mind fell down from its effort to become bright and was plunged in a kind of mournful recollection. . . . It was only a poor, mean life, after all, this to which she had returned. If only she had listened to Mr. Conway she might have passed into the clean, beautiful, lady-like life of some American city brighter and finer than Boston, while around her now, even in this moment of joy, was nothing but the same old talk that had come out of the land always, calves and pigs, mangels and turnips, springers and ewes, fairs and weather. All this from the elderly men beside her, while the younger people were enjoying themselves upon the floor. The name of Seumas Darcy, with the most insistent irrelevance, fell in and out of the conversation. She pictured him now with the most desolate clearness in all the way he must have conducted himself in her absence, entering through drink into a hopeless acquiescence in the life around him, the mean degradation of Ballyscurlock, a young man still, but harassed and broken before his time, cursing his luck continually, but making no courageous attempt to change it for the better. And when she thought of his letters which had so completely deceived her she felt very bitter against Ireland. It was the colour of Ireland, so richly hung around them, that had helped to deceive her, deceived her, maybe, into thinking that Seumas Darcy was the only one to whom she might ever be able to give the love of her heart.

She would be very glad now to feel that she was in any other place in the whole wide world. Yet she knew that she was already beginning to be tied to Dheel again. There were her little brothers and sisters to be thought of, and already she could see that her father and mother had many expectations from her. This sense of duty had been crushing in upon her almost unconsciously all day. It would be a monstrous thing in the eyes of the people if she shook off her sisterly

obligations. Thus impelled by the urgent crowd of these thoughts and impulses she was already gone far back into the old life. And she was not now as handsome as she had been at her going away. That restaurant had nearly been the death of her, the loneliness of Boston and the operation she had undergone unknown to anyone. Lying there in hospital had come to her the news that had, perhaps, been the means of gathering back all her thoughts, by way of a dream-filled hope, only to the desolation it had experienced this day.

One day during her convalescence, as she was looking idly over some newspapers, the big headlines of a notable event fell, with the weight of lead, as a crushing surprise into her mind. "Marriage of Novelist Conway," and below a photograph of the young man she had known for only a short, grand instant. . . . Then followed an account of his achievements. She skipped over anything there was about the bride. . . . It seemed such a little while since she had known him, and now he was married. And then she had cried and cried. . . .

Ah, well, maybe it was all for the best. . . . There were things in the turf fire now all queerly a-dance to the music of Willie Doolan's fiddle. . . .

Soon she felt that, in the leaden way of the country, her mind must fall finally into a mood of dull acceptance. All thoughts like these, of what she had suffered and known in America, must pass away from her. She almost felt that her American accent was already gone, for when she opened her mouth at all her words had a sound of correspondence with those in the voices around her. . . . Dear goodness, how very little interest she was taking in the dance, to be sure, and it in her honour, too, and very publicly, not like the secret, snatched pleasures long ago of the dances in the houses of the boreens. . . . Those far-off moments were sweet to her thoughts still, and the memory of them was all

that the elaborate joyousness about her was able to hurry into her mind now.

Andy Giveney came down out of the room. He was wiping his mouth with a turkey-red handkerchief. There was some kind of a smile playing upon the old, blanched lips from which he was drying the drink. He came and sat by her side. Her feeling for this old, vehement man was one midway between loathing and pity, but now she turned to him with a smile.

"It's all settled," he said. "I don't think I ever seen a thing of the kind to pass off so nicely and quietly. There was scarce a word of difference between either party about the fortune or anything, begad, not even the nail's breadth of a pound."

She did not seem to know what he was talking about until Oliver Moyles, after a wink from Andy, moved nearer and put his arm about her somewhat possessively. Not even then, until her mother and his mother came down and looked at them in that weak, watery way in which she, as a woman, saw clearly mirrored the inevitable fact of an immediate marriage. The fathers of the two of them had come out of the room too, and now stood smoking and chatting by the dresser. They were nodding and laughing as if their thoughts flowed in perfect harmony, and as if they had suddenly become of the one family.

Although she had not heard him she felt that Oliver had asked her out upon the floor for a dance. She had arisen, and was moving into the dance now, while her thoughts had suddenly become stilled into a great quietness. It seemed that she did not know this man at all, nor feel the clasp of his hand upon her arm and waist. . . . Her soul dumbly cried for one thing. If only he would do her the honour of decently asking her to marry him, but not a word, only that maddening air of possession with which he had just been invested by his elders through power of the bargain that had been made.

It was while the same wild, fluttering hope throbbed deep to her very soul that he withdrew with her to the half-door and looked across it in silence into the cool dark of the night. . . . Not a word still, only his arm around her roughly, and with no tenderness at all. . . . Oh, God, it was lonely, this quiet return to the lowest fold of the life of Dheel! Even the wild, soulless birds were crying out their love over the dew-wet fields. Momentarily a sudden, passionate whirr of wings told of a great lover speeding. . . . Then the maddening, silent lapses so still about her soul which was being burnt and torn. . . . She felt as if she must surely faint or die if she stood here longer. . . . There was a step on the road. It blissfully broke the stillness of her mind beyond the sound of the music behind her. The trees upon the other side of the road seemed to stand more erect and unblown by the night wind as if a noble moment might happen now.

The sound came nearer, but now it was less steady and certain. Sometimes it stopped altogether, and was then resumed, but always hesitantly. . . . And, more strangely, as it came nearer it seemed to grow weaker, making ever less disturbance upon the air. It might be the footfalls of a man fainting or drunk. It might. . . . But there now was the man standing clearly before them in the patch of light which was thrown out of the kitchen window. It was, oh, God knows it was, Seumas Darcy. . . . He stood there swaying in drunkenness and indecision. . . . His face looked so old and worn in this moment, and in this light, and his eyes were shining as if with tears. He made a step forward as if towards the house, but immediately drew back again and turned as if to retrace the way he had come. . . . Oliver tightened his grasp upon her waist as if to hold her attention still upon the man. To have seen so clearly who it was made him feel uneasy. . . . Her whole soul and body seemed flashed into life and

movement now. Her great moment seemed to have come and might never come again. Some madness seemed to have taken a grip of her, and Oliver was made almost afraid by the passionate glance she gave him. It was she who possessed now, although she, too, seemed to be possessed by something beyond her. . . . She had opened the half-door, and was leading him out into the circle of light. Now her arms were about his neck, and she was kissing him, kissing him as he had never before been kissed, in full view of Seumas Darcy. . . . There was just one gasp of pain from the man on the road, which sounded clear to them in this intensified moment of their revelation, although it was but half silence, a whisper almost of death, beneath what had become the pandemonium of the dance, and while there was now a wilder crying, a more urgent business of love, in all the air above the fields. Then there fell a lonely, heavy silence broken only by the sound of a man's feet scraping in hurry far down the road. . . .

Although Oliver was enkindled almost brutally now the words he spoke were words of pity :

" Poor Shameen, all the same, the poor devil ! It must have gone to his very heart to see us behaving this way ! "

She coldly checked her wild desire to sob as they turned back into the house, and her eyes were blazing as she stood once more upon the dancing-floor.

CHAPTER V

Early in the next month Oliver and Fanny were married. On the face of it their union had the appearance of one of the most wholly admirable alliances that had ever emerged out of the life of Dheel. And they did it in style. The wedding was made a memorable one and would have included nothing regrettable but for an unfortunate outbreak of their old enmity between Willie Doolan, the figure of mirth, and Andy Giveney, the figure of gloom. Willie had been so busy making wedding music all over the countryside just at this time that, what between sleeplessness and over-drinking and the repeated breaking of one of his fiddle-strings, he was in the worst of humour to-night ; although he had done his best to withhold himself for sake of appearances. But he could see that the face of Andy Giveney wore a continuous sneer at his discomfiture.

" Glong out of that with you, you ould, dreepy, miserable cur," he said in a sudden flare of passion, and, elbowing his ancient enemy away from him, he went at the fiddle with a tremendous flourish.

" Are ye as good a man as me with your fiddle and accomplishment and all ? Is it what you'd be comparing yourself with me anyway, and I with my great knowledge of the land making diversion forever and always in my burning mind ? " replied Andy hotly.

" I'll compare you ! " And with that the eyes of the man of music had flashed fire. . . .

" Is it challenging me ye are now ? "

" Come on out into the yard now and I'll settle you ? "

" Settle me, is it ? "

" Aye, I'll settle you."

It was doubly unfortunate that the dispute should

have arisen just at a moment when a lull in the festivities gave an opportunity for conflict which might not otherwise have come to the two old men. . . . Most of the wedding guests were at supper in the barn, which had been temporarily transformed for this purpose, and where plenty of spirits and a half-barrel, and almost everything in the way of eatables that it was possible to purchase in Ballyscurlock, were all laid out in lavishness upon three or four deal tables borrowed from the neighbours and placed end to end down the length of the floor. . . . The few people in the kitchen just at the moment were either too young to want drink at all or too drunk to ask for more. . . . Willie Doolan laid down his fiddle deliberately and took off his coat. Andy Giveney took off his coat, too, and spat upon his fists. Then they moved out to do battle in the yard. . . . Andy had never expected that Willie would have had the spirit in him to take up their age-long animosity so seriously at last. But he who had spent his life showing that he was an admirer of bravery and murder and direct action, must show, being put to it now, that he was no coward. Of course, he was no coward, but he never liked fighting—himself.

But for all that they went at it with a will in the paved yard outside, sprawling and grunting as they made for one another. Their very feebleness in one aspect of their fight was the means of producing a certain almost gruesomeness, for even an old man can strike an ugly blow when the condition of the other man is absolutely unguarded. Their fight was all blows, and soon both were drawing the blood of one another. It was surprising how they sustained the conflict, if not through the remembrance of their youth, which returned now to flash some strength through their quaking limbs. It became purely murderous. . . . They must have been quite a long while groaning and grunting and slipping and falling and hitting and bleeding, as long almost as the supper was in progress in the barn.

It seemed strange that the bride and bridegroom should have been the first to see them, but somehow it happened this way. It was the accidental result of a kind of honour they had been asked to accept, the honour of re-opening the dance again by a prolonged and private dance with one another. They were fully flushed with pleasure, for a great part of the troubled mind falls from one in the midst of a gay scene. The mind coming up, upon all sides, only against a bank of brightness cannot go wandering farther for the moment into its own gloom. All that had been for them in life before this, their lost loves, less perhaps than all else were their lost loves. . . . People, anyway, should never think of things that have been before the coming of the moments after marriage. . . . They felt a common desire to be gay now and thoughtless as in their young days in Dheel, for beneath all the solid structure of their real relation flowed, perhaps, some feeling in Oliver that he was dancing with Breedh Growney once again, and in Fanny that the man by her side was Seumas Darcy as once he had been. . . . They walked out of the barn in the direction of the kitchen with their eyes unlifted from one another. . . . Then the scene that was before them dashed of a sudden into their gathering joy. . . . The bloody faces of the old men and their watery, yet enkindled, eyes, the unnatural, ghastly excitement of their afflicted bodies. If Oliver was struck speechless with amazement, Fanny cried out as if from the pain of a blow. All the people of the dance were immediately in the yard or clustered wild-eyed about the door of the house or the barn. There was no look of enjoyment suddenly upon any face, no look anywhere only one of pain that was half pity too. A few men were now separating the combatants, but it was not easy seeing that they were stuck almost in a death grip. Willie Doolan clung tightly in agony as they tried to drag him away.

"Let me murder him, can't you. Let me do for him!"

And, like the actor that he was, Andy seemed to realise the presence of the crowd in the words he spoke out of his exhaustion and stupefaction.

"The blood in me never yet gave in once it was ruz. If only I could get the big Barber penknife out of my breeches pocket I'd settle him, so I would, the way I done for many another get in the days gone by."

But the end of their ferocity was come surely, and soon there were people rubbing their faces with wet towels, and giving them little sups of whiskey to bring them back to life. . . . It stood for the end of all the enjoyment, this terribly unaccountable conflict that had happened. Somebody had well expressed the sense of it by saying that it made one feel queer, so it did, to see two old man making such a determined attempt to put an end to one another like that. . . . If only it was two middling young fellows itself—over a girl or the like. . . . Nobody could be found to play the fiddle that Willie had abandoned for the first time within living memory. The dance broke up of a sudden. Couples and companies began to make their departure down the dark road or across the now dew-drenched fields where there were great shadows upon the grass near the bushes and trees. A few remained to watch by or repair the broken antagonists. . . . And Oliver and Fanny had not had their splendid loving dance together after all. . . .

In the grey of the morning they went away to Dublin for the honeymoon. This was customary even in the poor scheme of delight which flowed around Dheel, the spending by the newly married pair of a week, or at least a few days, in Dublin. Their importance in the world would, for the first time, become manifest to them through power of this adventure. As they went wide-eyed up and down through the city they would

not be able to keep from feeling that they were figures of curiosity, and, not without a certain pride, would they feel that they had communicated to those around the knowledge that they were a married pair. It could be so easily seen in their awkwardness or shyness or whatever it was, he in his new serge suit and she in her pale-blue dress and white, bridal hat. During the early part of the honeymoon they would patronise the vicinity of the more notable public buildings, their gawkish stare up at these being perhaps an additional reason why they attracted the looks of the passers-by. After a day or two of this most strenuous exhibition of themselves they would put on the appearance of being somehow weary of it, of even their own pride in their newly-entered state, for they would be more than a little footsore through dint of walking the hard pavements. The fourth day, at latest, would see a change in their method of emphasising to themselves the greatest passage in their lives. They would no more be seen moving among the thickly thronged places, but instead would have betaken them to certain streets around which a certain amount of tradition lingered in Dheel—Capel Street and Moore Street and Mary Street and Henry Street, where the sixpence-ha'penny shop was, to make small purchases for themselves and for their friends. The occupation of these, the latter days of their honeymoon, would stand for a direct foreshadowing of their return to Dheel. They would grow more and more impatient until the evening of their return came. About four they would be at Broadstone awaiting the six o'clock train to Castleconnor, himself rising every few minutes full of anxiety from beside herself, and inquiring from a harassed and increasingly profane porter what time would the six o'clock train be going, although there was a big clock right above them across whose dial the heavy hands were hopping industriously every second. . . . Down through

all the way of the long journey in the train there would seem to be a great silence bound heavily around their lives, changing them now with many a couple it had turned, in its desire of change, out of the ways in which, for all their littleness, they had known a certain freedom into the ways that would hold them so tightly. There might be a few of the neighbours in addition to their own people to make them welcome at the house, but their reception back into the life from which they had fluttered for a moment would all be done nicely and quietly. . . .

Nothing much would be seen of them for a few days, so tired and so in need of a rest would they be. About the fourth day or so after their return himself would be seen making his way to the fields just as if nothing at all had happened, and herself standing there at her own door in a stiff white apron, so that all the people could see her and they marching by.

"Begad, we'll see them at Mass a Sunday week?" was something which was always said with the satisfaction springing from its inevitability. The bride was not considered to be married in full decency until this had taken place. For some unknown reason it was considered unlucky also for the bride to go to Mass on the Sunday immediately succeeding the marriage ceremony. Thus there would have been a certain interval for the creation of expectation. Old women who did not go to Mass very often would make an effort to be there that Sunday. There would be deep furrows of anxiety through their prayers as they waited. . . . Then, suddenly, the bride and bridegroom would appear, himself walking in front, nervously enough perhaps, but with head erect, she following in his wake at a respectful distance. There was scarcely a long-married couple sitting in the pews but had been through the very same moment themselves. In watching this attempt of another couple to do the same thing they were expe-

riencing again the not unpleasant spell of nervousness out of which they had once passed. And even through the period of Divine Service this flutter of excitement in their breasts would find it very hard to die down, for, towards the end, it would be snatched up again by the gladsome expectation of the great talk they were going to have of the appearance of the couple on their way home from the chapel.

It was exactly in the rigid tradition of Dheel, that the married life of Oliver Moyles and his wife, Fanny had begun. . . . On the night of their return by way of Castleconnor station something had happened in Ballyscurlock earlier in the evening to determine its further quality. Seumas Darcy had never been known to be in such a condition of drunkenness behind the counter, for he had been drinking almost continuously since Fanny's wedding. Even Jamesey Ryan had admitted the superlative quality of his condition, and had sent him over to Castleconnor for goods just that he might get him out of his sight for a little while. Shameen was an infernal nuisance to have about the place, anyway, falling over things behind the counter and refusing and insulting customers. . . . It was a pitiful cursed business as between proprietor and shop-boy. . . . And yet there was some kind of puzzling bond between these two men. Somehow Jamesey did not have it in his heart to get rid of Seumas for good. In a way he was useful, for he did a lot of hard work, although he took a lot of drink itself. But this might be looked upon as being rightfully due to him on account of the smallness of the salary that he was paid :

" The poor, unfortunate devil, but, sure, devil to him anyway, he has my heart broke."

This was something that Jamesey would often say, embodying in itself a mixed tribute to a remarkable personality. He was saying it somewhat ferociously

this evening about the time Seumas was after having a few more drinks in Castleconnor, and was stumbling about the station as he tried to load the goods. He was there as the evening train drew in from Dublin. He was almost chilled into sobriety by the sudden thought that this might be the very train that was bearing the girl he loved and the man she had married back to their home in Dheel, for he had heard a rumour of their return in the morning. . . . He stood back into the shadow of the goods store and watched them alight from the train. Whether it was really felt or not he considered that she had a remarkable look and air of pride as she moved by the side of her man beneath the lamplight of the platform. But, of course, it must be sincere. Marriage made a woman like that. . . .

Dear God, it was hard to think of the number of letters he had written to her all the time that Oliver Moyles, the man by her side, had been courting Breedh Growney, who was married, too, to Eugene Gavacan, the madman. He had never gone walking with any girl, for the very good reason, probably, that no girl would go walking with him. But this aspect of the matter did not occur to his thought, for he was thinking only of the misfortune that had been wrought upon him. As if the immense shadow of all earthly doom had suddenly risen up about him he felt to his innermost soul the gloom and downfall of himself. . . . To think that this had happened now, that he had seen them coming home from Dublin together and going off into the darkness together. . . . The icy chill about his heart was suddenly changed to a fiery forest of rage through which his mind went burning. . . . For now he knew full well that he had lost her surely. The very fact of marriage had not caused him to feel half the finality of this little glimpse. . . . Although his body was sober his mind was still stumbling. . . .

In the yard beyond the goods store there was a wild

scene into which he now hurried. . . . The timbermen were driving in their weighty cargoes from the Hill of the White Lady, which Colonel Montagu Marlay's son, Fitzherbert Hamilton Marlay, another precious specimen of the "breed," was stripping of its luxuriant woods. In the promiscuous lamplight of the yard their sweaty, stubbled faces had more than a flashing look of savagery as they roared at their horses. . . .

"Howk-up there, Bess! easy, who-a-a! Blast you, back there, back, you devil you! There to it! Howk up! Way-a-a!"

Then there rose the continuous roar out of the business of unloading, the erection of the crane, the noise of chains and pulleys. . . .

The darkness was brightly flashed here and there by volleys of fiery curses from foul mouths. These men of huge strength, wrestling all day with giant trees, had won a certain fine primitive bearing from the nature of their continuous conflict. A mixture of grease and mud had made a kind of scaly armour upon those parts of their clothing which were not torn by the continuous exercise of howking and tugging and hauling. . . . There was an occasional glimpse of a hairy, sinewy leg or a hairy, iron chest. . . . There was no mistaking the kind of men they were, for they could kick one of their horses to death when he broke down under a tremendous load. Seumas Darcy with his drink and smoke enfeebled body, looked such a poor, shivering figure amongst them, so plainly out of keeping now, in this moment of his sobriety, with the strong wildness of the scene. . . .

Before the unloading was fully accomplished they caught sight of him and shouted crude words of welcome. He was well known to them, for it was outside Ryan's they always stopped with their loads when they passed through Ballyscurlock. Within the aura of their queer conception of friendship he appeared somehow different

and not drunken Shameen whom they had often cursed for not attending to them fast enough with their drinks. Meeting unexpectedly like this even a few miles away from Ballyscurlock was something like a delightful encounter with an old acquaintance in a foreign land. They called upon him to wait a minute, and he waited until they were finished. They gave the nosebags to the horses, and then he accompanied them across the road and into Keaveney's publichouse. . . .

Soon they were sitting around an array of glasses in the tap-room. Upon the table the excess of porter from some previous drinkers was spilled in pools. . . . The second thirst was now upon Seumas, and his tongue was burning. He gulped down his drinks as they flowed in in a quick succession of rounds. . . . His mind was parched, too, by torment, for the talk had turned as if inevitably upon the recent marriage, and excrementitious jokes and jibes had been flung at him by the timbermen. . . . His mind was reduced almost to the ashes of impotence, for had he attempted to answer them back with words any single one of them must have smashed him with a blow. . . . But his thought leaped, in savage hope of revenge upon those responsible for all these insults, at a notion that shaped itself out of a turn of their talk :

" And why didn't they invite us to the wedding and we passing the road every day with the loads ? "

" Aye, why didn't they ? "

" Oh, why didn't they ? Why, only because it was a grand turn-out entirely for the diversion of quality farmers, and, of course, we're only naked, lepping savages of timbermen."

" We'll show them ! "

" Yes, begad, we'll show them that we're as good as they are, only better ! "

" We'll boo them, we'll horn them, we'll blow the pride out of them ! "

The mind of Seumas now leaped almost fully revived into sudden and complete delight. This was the very thing. It was in accordance with a wild, unChristian custom which obtained hereabouts, the making of a loud sound of disapproval of any marriage. It was generally effected, this tremendous and ribald blast, with bottles out of which the bottoms had been broken. "Horning" was the term by which it was most often described, for a similar noise could be made by blowing into cows' horns, which might have been its original method of execution. It held a sense of weirdness almost like the cry of the banshee as it rang out over the fields and away beyond the bog and far over the world like the sound of the cattle lowing at eventide. Made enormous by its persistency from moment to moment at an ungodly hour, it always seemed such a powerful thing. The thought of it compelled the mind of the drink-sodden men now sitting here around the table, particularly all that was left of the consciousness of Seumas Darcy. It appeared almost his justification and his defence. Yes, he would horn them with the last breath left in his body. The world would know that in marrying Fanny Soraghan, in grabbing her from him to whom she belonged by every right, Oliver Moyles had done a thing as traitorous as if he had grabbed a bit of the beloved land. Indeed, everyone upon the wide earth should know that he had gone and robbed poor Shameen Darcy of his girl. . . .

So about nightfall on the next day, which was Saturday, a lot of the lowest riff-raff of Ballyscurlock began to slip into Ryan's. Seumas, because of the request for their assistance in the booing which he had already sent around, appeared immediately under a compliment to them. They called impertinently for pints for nothing or "on tick." Held by his intention Seumas had kept himself fairly sober all day, and so Ryan was not watching him as closely as usual. . . .

As each man went out he took a five-naggin whiskey or ginger-beer bottle from the yard and broke the bottom off it in a most businesslike way. . . . Then he slunk off up the road in the direction of Dheel.

When Seumas hurried breathlessly up the same way after closing time he found them all collected in a dark place on the road. The timbermen, unable to make Ballyscurlock before closing-time and coming drunk from Castleconnor, were now halted with the crowd. The lamps, hung upon the shafts, threw up a dim light upon their red, passionate faces. . . . They now greeted Seumas as some long-lost friend, for he had brought with him in his pocket a number of bottles to treat them all. He had given free bottles also at leaving to most of the rest of the rabble, so now, sufficiently mellowed by all the drink they had got for nothing, Seumas was a figure of sudden popularity amongst them.

"Me sweet fellow!"

"Me sound man!"

"A proper faggot she was to treat a decent fellow like you the way she did!"

"Our hearts is with you, Seumas, in your hour of trial!"

The timbermen put up their horses in an abandoned yard near the meeting place, and the conspirators coming together in a final dark ominous whispering laid out their plans. . . . They broke across the ditches at a word from Seumas, who for the first moment in his poor, defeated life felt the passion and the power of leadership and realisation. . . .

Oliver and Fanny were sitting quietly by the fire. The rest of the family had finally disappeared for the evening to accommodate them with this privacy. Fanny was looking over some additions to her wardrobe which she had purchased in Dublin, for even with all the clothes she had brought from America this was something

which had to be done as well to keep up the appearance she wished to make before the people—the lavish splendour of even more new clothes. She was now comparing these to their disadvantage with some of the fine clothes she had scraped hard to acquire in the States. This petty annoyance was holding all her mind. Some of the unseen powers of this house where his fathers had been begotten and where he himself had been begotten was stirring all the mind of Oliver. A sense of his manhood power was causing him to feel a great tenderness to this woman who might become the mother of his children. He was speaking kind words to her, almost love words, which fell unheard upon her ear, for she was having a little, cruel, mean thought of him. His words were unwelcome to her, for they had a sound of sadness in the neighbourhood of two thoughts. Seumas Darcy had written words very like them in his letters, and Oliver had maybe spoken these self-same words to Breedh Growney before she had married Eugene Gavacan. In a blank moment of ugliness it flashed into her thought that her life had been tricked of something. And what was it she had lost in her lonely journey through the valley of losing? She scarcely dared to think. Yet it was strange that in this very moment she should be remembering Mr. Conway, the famous author, once again. . . .

They were silent, and into that silence crept the lonely sound of the horns. It came to them as the chilling, accusative echo of something they had not done with their lives. . . . Even in the short period of their married life they had felt and seen that they might never be able to flow to the flood into one another's lives. It was a coldness rather than a rush of burning love which now stole in upon them with the sound of the horns. A sense of separation putting them further out of one another's lives while their mind each was held only by a thought of the other in another relation.

Their minds had already lapsed from that firmness of regard which should be all that could be meant to them by married love. . . .

The horns were still blowing, now far distant over the bog, now coming nearer with a sudden intensity of mourning above the less mournful sound of the trees. . . . The pitiful echoes of lost love-words, the swan-songs of dreams, the trembling accents of farewells. . . . There was a great pitilessness in that loud sound. And as if to sink it deeper into their hearts, some blower of a horn would now and then detach himself from the main chorus, probably at the instigation of Seumas himself, and come quite near to blow a clear, loud sound. . . . The newly-married pair looked into the eyes of one another in these instants, while the last flickers of love died down . . . died so cold and lonely without the slightest effort of either to make them live greatly again and forever maybe out of the uplifting moment of a common torment.

If he cared the least little bit for her at all he must run out of the house and make an attack upon whatever ruffian had come thus near, smashing him with the one blow as if in gallant defence of his wife. . . . This was Fanny's thought, born of her great hunger for love.

And Oliver was wondering, too, towards the accomplishment of disappointment only, why she could not throw her arms around him and say: "Sure, it's only that drunken Shameen Darcy, that's doing this and what about him, anyway, my own poor Oliver!"

Nothing only two cold looks in this silent house, where the people were sleeping in the rooms away from them, so that they might be quite by themselves, but now so sadly far away from love amid that surrounding, tremendous sound. . . .

THE THIRD REFLECTION

CHAPTER I

Outwardly Oliver and Fanny were living just as any other man and wife had ever lived before them in Dheel. And maybe they were just as happy, although there was sometimes a blank coldness low and heavy over both their lives. The fortune she had brought Oliver, the famous fortune, was being put to its uses. Half of it had gone to do for some of the Moyleses. Felix had gone to a shop in Carrick-on-Shannon, Marion to the drapery business in Trim, Phil to serve his time as a carpenter with Alexander Walshe in Ballyscurlock. It was hoped, indeed fully expected, that Fanny would soon turn her attention to some of her own family, to Tess in particular, who wanted to go to the convent school in Castleconnor preparatory to going on for the teaching. Oliver had already, in addition, made some fine improvements about the yard, and the premises, which James Moyles talked over, with a great whet of pride upon his words, to old Andy Giveney as the two of them stood colloguing in the long spring evenings upon the road in front of the new house that Oliver had just built for himself and his wife. . . . The bitter words of the ancient man grew kind upon his tongue as he stood in the presence of such evidence of the people's triumph over the forces which stood grim and stark behind the land. It almost made up for the trick that Colum Bray had played upon James at the time of his own marriage.

However, an ugly feeling upon every hand was the certain spitefulness which had arisen with regard to the rising fortunes of Oliver Moyles, his grand new house, the luck which would seem to be attending him upon every hand It became twisted into a bitter

regard of his wife. They looked at her with wide, watery eyes which seemed to spill out a certain scorn, and said one to another that now wasn't it strange that although she was only a year or two older than Oliver she looked old enough to be his mother, and that although her mother before her had had plenty of childer she seemed to be getting into her face, don't you know, the crippled look of a woman that was never going to have a child. . . . Oliver could see all this in the face of those among whom he moved, and, continually, his mind was bent into one turn of remembrance and ran in spite of him upon Breedh Growney, his lost love, who was married to Eugene Gavacan. It was a poor thing for a man to be thinking of the wife of another, and not of his own woman. He used to see her standing at the door as he passed down to the fields, a fine figure of a woman surely. Moving not far from her would be Eugene Gavacan, a very savage-looking man for any woman to be the wife of, and growing more terrible daily, seeing that his beard was now grown even bigger and more bushy across all his face. As something which made him almost fearful he saw now that she was putting on the signs of having a child for the madman. It was a source of torment to Oliver that he must watch her splendid body. . . .

Often now, a part of the queerness that grew upon him with the gathering of time, he passed out from the presence of his wife in the evenings and went walking gloomily down the road and past the fine place of Eugene Gavacan so that he might have the joy of seeing Breedh move about the dusky yard, her soft body still as dear to his heart as in the old days of the dances in Dheel. There he would stand, his mind consumed between his present torture and all his kindling memories of the lovely, vanished past. . . . Often he would steal into the yard and up to the window after she had gone into the house, and, through the glass which pre-

vented any sound coming to his ears, gaze long upon that interior, lit so brightly always by her presence, which had come to be mirrored in his very soul.

There he would often see an accustomed evening group seated in that house, which was a lonely house, too. The husband, Eugene himself, half-hidden in a cloud of tobacco smoke, yet with the mad glint in his eye darting out every now and then ; Andy Giveney, no less, on the other side of the fire slapping his old knee, now worn so thin and sharp inside his wide, ancient trousers, as he emphasised some story of the land ; Breedh, who was once his Breedh, sitting between and listening, not to their murderous talk of the land, but very painfully indeed, it always seemed to Oliver, within the silence of her own soul, to echoes of her childhood days, days of her young girlhood, days that were gone.

And maybe there was some hope and happiness of which she, like him, had dreamt beyond the trouble and travail of the land. If he had married her, surely he must have forbidden that old ruffian the house, himself and all his gloomy stories of murder and affliction. But maybe not, for despite all his visioned contentment with Breedh, his mind must, even in that case, have dwelt a great deal upon the land. It was merely his strange distraction that took his mind away from it now.

Day by day the woman he had married seemed to increase, not in affection nor in the ways a woman might for love of her husband, but in coldness and peevishness, seeing that she could not keep him from wandering out away from her so strangely in the evenings and along the dark, shadowed road, almost as mad nearly in his way as Eugene Gavacan, with everyone wondering and asking her where to and where from he would be forever going and coming. He effected all the dwelling of his eyes upon Breedh so very secretively that Fanny became merely madly

puzzled as to the purpose of his absence from her, the whole long night sometimes. . . . She knew well that it was not to Ballyscurlock he went, for there was never the slightest appearance of drink upon him when he came in, often very late indeed, and lay down so lovelessly by her side. . . . No clue at all gleaming with even the evil gleam of treachery, nothing save that heavy silence which darkened her mind with the darkness of his. It was a lonely life she had, surely, waiting here in this house of hard words alone until bedtime always, thinking now of Mr. Conway, the famous author, and now of Seumas Darcy, the drunken shop-boy, one a man who had once spoken rich, sweet words of love and longing to her, and the other a man who had written to her of love most eloquently. . . . Ah, goodness me ! Then from this weary way of thinking she would turn down a dark, quiet boreen of sadness as she looked deeply into the mirrored mind of the man whom God had given her. . . . Breedh was going to have a child, and she supposed that it was of this glad, glad, lovely thing he must be thinking now. . . . She would never have a child for him, and there was a wound of everlasting, piercing pain in this thought.

As the empty years wore on and if he took to drink she knew full well that, when the mood of devilment crept into the hour of drinking in some dark pub, men would taunt him about his childless wife. Maybe Seumas Darcy would make them mad enough with drink to do this at any moment now, even as he had organised the horning of them on the night of their homecoming from the honeymoon. How vile this thing called love could make men be when the great inner beauty of love had been banished from their hearts ? And this was what all her lovely hopes of love had narrowed down to after all the long days she had worked so hard in Boston. She was nothing to her man, little even to her own people now that she had made a good

match for sake of them. . . . Her mind knew moments of hopeless rebellion which were crushed after such a little while by realisation of the heavy, hopeless tyranny of the life of Dheel. . . . It was easy indeed for Breedh to have a child even for Eugene Gavacan. Breedh's eyes had never been exiled from view of the soft fields to looking only upon hard, ugly streets through the long, blank days of her sojourn in America. . . . She had never had herself ripped open with knives in a dangerous operation.

And so, born of all these defeats through thoughts of hopeless anger, there was a terrible hatred in her heart on the dark, windy night that she followed Oliver out of the house, and slunk along behind him in the great shadows of the trees. It was here that she had viewed the spilling gold in the hush of noontide far over the green fields of Dheel, on the brave day when she had walked so proudly into Ballys clock to see the man she had remembered so brightly through all the lonely days. . . .

Through the billowy trees upon her left hand the wind came rushing down like flowing waters upon her face and hair. Through breaks in the hedge she glanced out in affright every now and then, and saw the gently-hilly fields heaped like billows up against the silent hills towards Castleconnor. To her dancing eyes they seemed to rush and rock and flow. They seemed to rise mountains high with a wicked spume of fury white upon the lips of their being. They seemed to gather round her, lifting her high, dashing what remained of her poor strength against what remained of the strength of her soul. . . . She moaned in her shattered agony, and, back almost from the edge of her life, staggered crying into life again. The land out of the great, dark ocean of sorrow that it was, had made the first determined onslaught upon her, because in following her husband upon this night she was doing a thing to question the right of the land, out of all its power and cruelty, to shape her destiny.

His face, his body, and the very soul of him whom she thought she had known, shrivelled into small compass as she saw from a distance, yet so clearly, his face and the light in his eyes. . . . A smile that was that of a very devil to her warmed upon his lips as he stood at last by the kitchen window of Eugene Gavacan's house and caught sight of the scene within. . . . She watched it flowing into sudden changes, her soul now peering out to catch a glimpse of his soul at the very end of long chasms of doom, very long spaces that were to him only flashing instants of great gladness in looking upon this woman who was now the wife of another man. Oliver had no notion that the temple of his dearest desire, that very dim and distant interior which is the soul of man, was being seen even as he now saw this other interior, and that through the night, so great with unheard music, was hurrying a whisper of death's lonely ending. . . .

He peered more eagerly through the window now. Old Andy Giveney was not in his accustomed place to-night. But Eugene Gavacan at once compelled attention as he sat there glowering into the fire of red turf. . . . Breedh had some light, flimsy material in her hand, and she was sewing. It might be baby clothes, for surely she was ever approaching nearer her time. Suddenly Eugene seemed to jump excitedly upon his stool and Oliver could hear him shouting:

"I'm going to burn my grand new navy-blue breeches now!"

Oliver gave a further eager, anxious look through the window, and discovered that Eugene had been really sitting in his shirt, and that in one of his big hands he held a collection of trousers buttons. It seemed for a moment very puzzling, but, upon recollecting the wild possibilities of insanity, Oliver guessed that the man to whom they had married his Breedh was after burning all his trousers for sake of the buttons now gathered in

his hand, evidently, because of the gleeful look he wore, to make child's play. He had just declared his intention of burning his best trousers, the one belonging to the fine, expensive suit in which he had been married. Breedh, her face all sadly twisted in a kind of afflicted correspondence to the comical gruesomeness she was obliged to witness, now laid a restraining hand upon her husband, but he shouted again :

" I want to burn it. I say I want to burn it ! "

There was something pitifully childish in the shout, although it held as well a sound which went echoing down into the very deeps of sorrow. There was an almost amusing ghastliness in his appearance as he stood there in his shirt, his eyes burning wildly out of his forest of beard, while his little wife was trembling by his side. Now he made an animal-like spring towards the door of the room where his clothes were, and Breedh, at that moment feeling perhaps the final desolation of some fugitive romantic notion in the proposed destruction of portion of his wedding suit, made an attempt to restrain him. He turned of a sudden and caught her savagely. . . . For a moment only Oliver swayed in indecision by the window. . . . Then he rushed into the kitchen, and springing upon Eugene caught him by the throat. . . . Instantaneously it was a fierce encounter, for Eugene was a powerful brute of a man at any time, and now the added strength of madness was upon him. They fought desperately from the table to the dresser and back again by the fire. The red sods of the fire upon the hearth were scattered out around the floor by their passionate feet. . . . Breedh had fainted.

As Oliver fought with all his strength to throw the madman down he saw his wife, Fanny, enter hurriedly by the open doorway, through which the dark and windy night was blowing. Very clearly he saw her catch the whole wild scene in a frightened glance, and then bend

down with a rush of pity to the assistance of Breedh. . . . Even in the most intense moment of the fight he knew another moment beyond this when he felt the scorch of shame. Had his wife known, seeing that she had come in here now, even although it was as a blessed part of Providence she had come? Or was it that, unheard by him, the cry of one woman to another in her hour of need had hurried loudly down the road to Fanny where she must have been sitting lonely by the fire, as always in the lonely, empty evening. . . .

But at last Eugene was overpowered, a heavy lump upon the floor, with all the fire gone out of him. . . . In the last moments of the fight, when both men had been blinded to all sight or thought of anything around them, Fanny had carried Breedh into the bedroom. Her face was very white now as she came back into the kitchen. Her words, when she spoke, of themselves prevented Oliver from at once searching for any deeper meaning in them than the terrible obvious one that they held.

"Oh, Oliver, will you run down the road for some of the women, and get a gosoon to hurry into Castleconnor for the priest and doctor. This is terrible, so it is, happening now and Breedh the way she is."

CHAPTER II

Whenever a great misfortune happened in Dheel the afflicted were comforted by the reminder that it was all " the will of God." And, even amongst the good and pious, there were not a few who did not forget to say that, whatever disaster of the home might be in question, it was the result of a curse happening now in return for some evil thing that had been done somewhere and by someone in the days gone by. But it was accepted generally with such admirable resignation by those upon whom it fell that, in most cases, the results were better than could be even wildly hoped for.

" Mebbe it's all only for luck ! " This was another customary way of putting it, and as if in obedience to the observation, the very best result would come of what was dark and lonely.

But in no other way could this sorrow that had befallen the Gavacans be regarded than as a thing deplorable, indeed, the man himself sent raging wild to the Asylum in Mullaghowen and the child come before its time. Yet it was not altogether in this sad light that the wife's people saw it. They had married Breedh to Eugene, not, of course, that there was any love between them, but simply because he was Eugene Gavacan, one of the " snuggest " farmers in Dheel, in the hope that through an alliance they might come by some of his possessions. Although there was some virtue in the madness of Eugene in this relation it held in itself its own defeat, for wild and all as Eugene certainly was, he was not quite so foolish as not to feel the purpose of the Growneys. It took only quite a very little realisation of Eugene's retention of so much sense to keep them away. But now as soon as Breedh had

regained her health, or, in fact, as soon as Eugene had been hurried away to the asylum, there arose a great coming and going of the Growneys about house and farm. Even Andy Giveney said it was a kind of shameless. It was the sort of thing, he said, that was a kind of not right, but he excused it on grounds of the overmastering desire of the people to get their two feet firmly planted upon the land. The girls came hurrying home from the towns in which Breedh had helped them to positions on visits to their sister; the boys, too, appeared anxious to take their "welt" out of the rich fields. Everyone of them seemed very anxious to give advice or to be her manager in the hope that through these offices of kindness they might be enabled to walk beneath the windy skies of Dheel with the means of Eugene Gavacan in their pockets and in his shoes of pride.

As a piece of misfortune, perhaps easily forgotten in the circumstances, since it had happened as a direct result of them, old Growney died. Almost as a touch of phantasy, by way of emphasising his triumph over the diabolical forces which had robbed the people of their land in the bad old times, and perhaps at the instigation of Andy Giveney, who remained his boon companion all through its extended celebration, he had dressed himself up in a loud sporting suit, such as they had seen Colonel Montagu wear upon the occasion of some ferocious homecoming to Dheel, and spent the time driving from Ballyscurlock to Castleconnor and back again by Mullaghowen, stopping, of course, at all the wayside pubs along the road to Dheel, and often spending a full day drinking in Garradrimna, the whole going to form a miniature expedition undertaken in imitation of some grand tour of the Colonel around the gay places of Europe in quest of joy. Upon the regrettable conclusion of this adventuring, Breedh's mother bought an array of widow's weeds as dark and sorrowful as those

of any lady in the land, and drove the road every other day in Gavacan's trap to make a fine parade of them. It was a regular disturbance to the usual placid life of the green fields of Dheel, the spectacle of this elderly, heavy woman in black driving, driving always for no other reason it would seem than that people might see her driving in her rich clothes of sorrow.

It was a course of behaviour well calculated to aggravate the wrath of the neighbours, especially those who claimed kinship with the man who had gone to the asylum. It was the thing above all the rest which drove them to speak their mind concerning the crew that he had married into.

"Begad, it was the fine thing the Growneys made out of it, the whole of them, by marrying an unfortunate idiot like Eugene Gavacan. It's always a grand, successful affair when a whole family turns round like that and marries a rich man."

There fell across the life of Dheel now one of those long moments when, in the meagre passage of events, life was held by one dominant movement, and this was the uprise of the Growneys. The fields seemed to make a mirror, in daylight and dusk and in the dark, of this gesture of the triumph of the people over all the sorrow that had ever sprung from the land.

The brothers of Breedh had already begun to buy cattle and to stock land other than their own. Success and the rapid movement of comfort into wealth stood for an almost continuous celebration of the marriage of Breedh and Eugene. It was a thing like this which exercised a certain compulsion towards marriage. This, and maybe the queer pair known as the ancient lovers who lived far down the road where the rich fields of Dheel fell away into the bog.

. . . . . .

The little cottage lay at about the most desolate spot

upon the Castleconnor road. The hills behind them lent all the other houses of Dheel some sense of protection, as of life as it should always be, enclasped in arms all soft with fondness. But one saw that the break in the hills was just behind this little cottage, and it was the cause, beyond all else, which lent it its extreme aspect of desolation. It knew no kindly hand of shelter from the world. It was a wind-swept place upon the edge of loneliness. And yet as if to tell the quality it held a light would shine there betimes at night like a lit lamp of love.

This was the little house of Barbara Connaughton, who, for forty years, had been the drudge in Simon Callery's house. For every night of forty years she had come along this lonesome road and down to this, its loneliest spot. Yet her life had not been altogether joyless, and she would go down to local history in a greater blaze of pride than the finest daughter of a farmer who had ever dressed in silks and lived in a fine house and married a man. And why only because she had never bartered for any lesser thing the splendid prerogative of love. All life she had been a lover, and beautifully, too, of one man only, and now far into the years she was a lover, since she had never given him the "go-by." And he, too, had remained faithful to her, although "the words" had never been said over them, but because they were faithful they knew their own sanctity, and they did not care for they were lovers still, "the ancient lovers," as they called them here.

Every evening after nine, no matter how fine or how bad the night was, Barbara came down this way. Were it not for the fact that she was always quite alone, without any flock around her, she might look exactly like an old crow, so black was the shawl wrapped closely around her shrunken, creaking frame, and the never-changing method of her homeward going.

Sometimes a figure would step across her path out of

the shadows of the ditch, the figure of a tall, dark man, and pass almost quite insensibly into her walk down the road. No word of surprise or salutation would have sprung between them, or any sign at all to signify that they were different beings. On a summer evening they passed, it would appear, subservient to the almost perfect stillness, speaking only in the murmurous way of lovers. In winter they were blown along like bits of intertwining twigs driven down by a bitter wind from the bent trees above them.

More often, however, they had a remarkable way of meeting. At the end of this most desolate sweep of road Barbara would reach the little cottage where she lived. It would be only a cold, lonely place after her absence from it during the day, the smouldering gleam of an almost burned-out sod maybe all that remained lighting up the narrow place in the sad winter evening.

But soon Barbara Connaughton would have gone on her knees, and, having blown up the sods, would somehow have lit the candle and placed it in the window. Its poor light would seem to flicker timidly and in affright before the enormous darkness outside. Yet the eye and the mind of Barbara were always held by it as if it might soon be responsible for something of great significance in her life. But it would appear, too, because of the mask of mental stillness which her face would have put on, that she was listening, listening, too, in immense and fateful expectation.

And then, as a sound in answer to the light came from far down the road, another light would flash across her white, faded face. . . . Her lips would move to the music of a whisper from her very soul:

"Ah, there he is! Again to-night! Ah, goodness me! And fancy that now!"

A flicker of ecstasy would thrill her limbs as she went out to face the direction from which the whistle had come, something which gave her the

appearance of a young girl going out in delight to meet her lover. And what else was she only this, even though she might seem an old, passionless wisp of a woman enveloped by a shawl.

And now she would be standing at the little wicket gate as of old, his big, hard hand heavy upon hers where it lay upon the upper ledge of the gate, in spite of the pressure, fluttering. He would always loom great above her, exaggerated hugely in the half-darkness, a gaunt rook of a man, as they said, this same Red Michael, a ragged beard all around his face, and the powerful shoulders of him, and the huge, heavy head. It would almost seem as if he had contracted a stoop through almost perpetual gazing down upon her beauty, for they had been nearly fifty years courting now.

"And, musha, how are you, Barbara?"

"Aren't you badly off to know?"

"I am, surely."

"Gwan out o' that with you!"

"Give us a kiss, Barbara."

"Aren't you bad for kisses?"

"Mebbe I am!"

"Just a little one!"

"Well, bad cess t'ye anyway!"

"You poor little thing!"

"Poor Mick, the poor fellow, sure I wouldn't refuse him for the world. . . . There now, will that satisfy you. You have me killed with kisses."

And so, despite all the tide of years down which their lovemaking had rolled, they were still the lovers they had been in their young days. Because there lingered in it a more intimate touch of the associations of their youth they chose often to dally like this by the wicket gate even when the night was cold. There was another thing which they often did. And this was something which put a rather villainous construction upon their affection far back to the end of the longest

boreen in Dheel whenever a few people might be gathered to talk. They would go together into the house and leave nothing to tell of their being in this world but the little light shining out over the bog.

Looking at the light in the window sometimes many a one would often try to puzzle out the circumstances which had brought this poor, quiet ending of romance to be. For the frame of Red Michael was still sufficient to show that he must have been a fine man in his day, and that maybe Barbara, too, had had her show of grace and comeliness. What matter that the long back of Red Michael was beginning to bend or that the wispy hair of Barbara always made one think of a wisp of a woman hidden in a shawl, they must have been a fine, proud pair when they began their courting. And fine they must have remained far into the sunny years of his manhood and her bright girlhood, and fine even into the middle age of both of them. And yet it must be, in the very heart of it, a sad thing, indeed, that Red Michael had never married Barbara. For surely he might easily have done as much, big and strong as he was, and with a great reputation as a labourer, and provided for her, instead of breaking all her beauty as the drudge in Simon Callery's house. It was sad to think of all the Advents and all the Shrovetides that had passed them by. The disturbing spectacle of marriages taking place around them must surely have made them think of marriage, too. But they had never married, in spite, perhaps, of many dark, blank moments of anger which must have come to them because of their unwedded state. Yet, perhaps some finer regard had transcended all their relations, that to be lovers only was their finest way of showing their love for one another, and that they had won a finer wisdom in their unmarried state. And yet maybe the purpose of them as the ancient lovers was far other than any continuous attempt to connect them-

selves with happiness. For often as a loving couple wandered down past the little cottage, and as they went on so warm in their dream, the girl would lean against the young man's shoulder and say, as they went past the ancient loving pair by the wicket or past the light in the window which was there to show that the notorious pair were engaged in loving perhaps more deeply in another place.

"Look at that now. Wouldn't they nearly frighten you?"

"It's terrible strange about them. It's funny that they never married."

"How funny it is? You wouldn't want to go make Barbara out of your little me."

"Indeed, no, nor Red Mick of myself."

"I suppose we ought to begin to think of getting married." . . .

And in such a moment as this the ancient lovers all unconsciously would have enforced their unconscious purpose.

And many a one would often remark that there was an extraordinary number of struggling young couples married upon middling poor spots of land down from the rich fields of Dheel, often, in fact, on the very fringe of the bog itself, where it was loneliest and most forbidding by night or day, in the neighbourhood of the cottage of Barbara. . . . And saying this such people would add maybe in the same breath that it was a shame for Red Michael and Barbara to be going on the way they were even still in the presence of the young rising families of those who, growing afraid of them, had married young.

. . . . . .

This queer pair seemed to represent the middle group, the power of balance towards marriage, but on

the other side there was the group which stood as something deterrent, a contrary warning always. This group afforded continuous exemplifications of the case in which the husband's people seemed to make the most out of the marriage and stood in a way for the sending of the wife to the wall. The case of Oliver and Fanny was such. It was said that he did not treat her too well, but that he could be otherwise seemed scarcely to be expected, seeing that she had had no child for him. It was said that she had only a lonely sort of a life of it, and the rumour was abroad that things were already known or guessed at which promised that it might be worse for her. But the deterrent example was never of more than slight power, even although mothers and marriageable girls would sometimes think that, God help them, it was always the poor woman who came to the wall. But the strong brutality of the fields of Dheel succeeded ever in driving out any protective thought which might have come.

There was another reality which ploughed through all this time and far into the minds of those who thought of it. For, in spite of all the stillness that was upon this place, its life was shaping all its forces towards some definite ending. And this ending would be definite only in one sense, that it would be the greatest tragedy that these fields had ever known, so great, indeed, that even as defeated villains the fields might for a long while desire to hide their still merciless hearts beneath a hill of shame. Oh, they might be so quiet then, very still, indeed, and without any traitorous smile of bewitchment beneath summer sunlight, beneath winter moonlight, their unseen billows of anger and destruction by all unseen!

The events of the present promising adventure of the family had a tendency, so distinguished were they by success, to obscure the principal figure of any great event which might become shaped out of them, Breedh

herself. The little son whom its father's madness had hurried into the world before his time was a hard burden in the rearing. She realised that there was no great love between her family and herself. In fact, they never came near the place, none of them at all, unless when they wanted to haul something away. It was a lonely life, indeed, that she lived in this house now. But she knew the comfort of the child, even though it always looked so weak and little as it lay there crying, crying always in the cradle by the fire. And whenever it would be taken by a passionate fit of crying and come near to death she would feel around her the hurried torture of the wild night upon which it had come into the world. . . . There were times when she would snatch it up and kiss it wildly, imploring it with an anxious question just as if the little child had sense to understand : " Oweneen, Oweneen, is it what you want to cry me down into the grave ? "

And as the child grew stronger it seemed to be the cause of some regret that the wild scene just before his birth had begun to fade from her memory, for even with all its sorrow there was something about it to which her mind clung with a strange affection. . . . The face of Oliver had looked so lovely in its strength and pride as he rushed in to save her life. Yet she felt that it was a natural affliction of life, after all, that beauty should begin so soon to fade, but beside the ruin of beauty the eyes grow wistful and look out in longing. . . . and it stands as a perpetual atonement for the sorrow of the world that there comes some other thing upon which the soul of longing eddies into rest. . . . As the little boy grew stronger she would gaze into his face and eyes with a joy that leaped higher daily. . . . People would express themselves idly as to the one he resembled, but it was given her, the mother, with the eye of her heart, to truly see. . . . Little Oweneen was the living image of Oliver Moyles. . . . And with

what loving tenderness would she look as she saw. . . . And she would think all tenderly of Oliver.

When first this gladness had begun to rush in upon her there came with it long moments of half-pained, half-pleasant, puzzling, why, by what strange chance, had Oliver rushed into the house to save her from her death at the hands of the half-crazy Eugene, just before she must have a murderous end, and maybe her child with her. . . . Why at all had he come there so bravely in the full strength of his fine person, he who was in her mind so greatly always? She had little notion, indeed, that for very long before that he had been gazing upon her in protection every night. . . . Little did she know that even now he used to stand outside the window every night watching her with dancing eyes as she played with the child, listening with a great gladness to every syllable as she called it by turns "Oweneen," "Olivereen," while dandling it upon her knee.

Sometimes she would almost wish that he might hurry of a sudden into this greater moment, even as he had come so unexpectedly into the other, that he might run in from off the road in passing to gather her wildly into his arms and kiss her child, with a great sweetness on his lips. She did not even faintly guess how very often he was so near to doing this. . . . Dear me and dear-a-dear, little Oweneen was so very like him as to make her wish that she could always call him Olivereen, even before the neighbours.

Once as Oliver walked back to his lonely, loveless house after a night of gazing he thought that he saw a figure immediately strange to him in this place at such a time. It was almost, in the moment of its appearance, like some kind of a queer, bad thing such as made him remember words from the frightful chronicles of Andy Giveney as he had listened to them when a boy:

"A crying ghost or a dog or the devil or Montagu Marlay or something not right."

And, stranger than all, the man now hurrying away had a back like the humped, drunken back of Seumas Darcy, who had been a boy with him and who had listened to the same wild stories in those dead days. . . .

It was he who had married Fanny Soraghan and not this unfortunate companion of his youth. And maybe Seumas was only coming out from Ballyscurlock to take a secret look at Fanny, just as he himself was taking so many secret looks at Breedh. . . . He stood for a long time at his own gate like a man with head bent almost in the attitude of prayer, thinking dreamily. . . .

CHAPTER III

Another winter had lifted into spring, and always with the passage of the nights out of the long, blessed darkness there was less and less lovely opportunity for Oliver to gaze in lonely rapture upon his beloved and her child. And with the creeping-in of spring the clay had begun to gather heavily around even his thoughts of love. But his eyes were not long without sight of her at any time, for while the men he could now employ were ploughing or doing any other kind of harder labour he would pass the house many times a day as he went about the comparatively easier occupation of carting great loads of dung down to the tillage field. . . .

By some continuous chance, as it were, Breedh would always seem to have just come to the door as he passed, the child in her arms and her bosom soft beneath her loose cotton dress. He would bid her the time of day with what calm civility he could summon, but his eyes would be upon her in furtive glances of fondness until he had gone with his horse and load across the bit of a hill which would hide her from his view. . . .

It was a queer old world, he often thought so sadly in the accustomed phrase of Dheel, and his thought had begun to imprison him in the condition they called "queerness." Those among whom he moved and worked could make no attempt to understand him. Because he drank scarcely ever at all it was clearly not a case of that kind with him, and drink to them was at once the root of all joys and the crown of all sorrows. He was a thriving man, for he had married well. It was not in the nature of Dheel to remain puzzling itself like this for very long. If it could not find one out of

what was passing around it must be driven to invent an explanation that would be sufficient unto itself. . . .

And so, it would seem, in obedience to this desire, as the year flowed richly into summer a rumour began to arise in fragrant hay-fields at the hush of noontide. At first the poisonous word was somewhat shrewdly embedded in a question which men would repeat in anxious wonderment to one another just as if it greatly mattered to them.

It was not strange at all that a man's affection should be twisted into the crooked, ugly ways of hate. But poor Seumas Darcy must have had a lot to bear, in the way of listening to talk about it since the marriage had taken place. The jibes that he had had to put up with, the way that Andy Giveney would be always spitting it out of his mouth as he hobbled past the door, afraid to enter, perhaps, but not afraid to speak his mind as he went by. The drink that had once brought him wild, affectionate thoughts now brought him only thoughts of hatred crawling blackly out of the sink into which the human soul can be plunged by the sorrow that may flow out of the world. It is thus that the outer sorrow of life becomes commingled with the natural sorrow in the mind of man, and tears flow out of the eyes and the heart sighs greatly.

Even in what he had caused to be done after the marriage, the " horning " whose wild blast had sounded a loud note of foreboding all down through Dheel, there had lingered a faint echo of the fine things, even though they are brutal, which a man may do for love of beauty. Even although it had been contrived and hired it wore the appearance of something that the people had done in defence of the name of Seumas Darcy. Whilst he had heard it recounted, in drunken snatches by the timbermen and the rest during the days that followed, the recollection of it made him think in a way that he was still a man. But the thought had dwindled sadly,

for heroism was no longer any element of the life out of which he had attempted to evoke even a bit of brave depreciation. Even in the half-mad way in which he had entered the poor adventure of it he was not without some realisation of certain dominant qualities in the life around him. And thus did he now begin his attempt to construct a course of action from two aspects of that life which had come to impress him because of their efficacy. He knew that if a man wanted to avert suspicion from himself the very best way of doing it, so that he might go on with the thing he liked, was to cause a heavier suspicion to be thrown upon another who might have it in his mind at the moment to be doing a similar thing. And he wanted to be looking on Fanny an odd time, although she was sad and withered and lonely by reason of what she had done to him, and he knew that Oliver never spent an evening of his life with her in the house. . . . He knew, too, how glad to say the most hurtful, the most evil thing were the people of Dheel and Ballyscurlock always. . . . And so had fallen from him the dark words to fashion this mean implication which was now being uttered to stand in grim finality for the end of manhood in him, the end of love.

The Lord save us, but isn't the poor, delicate little child that Eugene Gavacan left after him, and he going to the asylum, the dead image of Oliver Moyles. It's funny, so it is! This whisper seemed to be gathering ever closer around him. Then, in the sudden light of the word that had been said, people would remember that Oliver had been seen slipping the road many a dark night in the neighbourhood of Gavacan's house. The number of times he had been seen along that dark bit of a road became lumped together, an anxious, jostling crowd of accusative bits of evidence. Didn't it surpass to think of him follying her still even after she had been wedded according to all the laws of the Church in holy

matrimony to another man ? Indeed, it was no wonder that poor Eugene Gavacan was after running off mad to the asylum. . . . They supposed, for the sake of the sense of conviction it carried to their minds, that the poor, unfortunate fellow had caught them in the act on the night he had taken the fit. How else could Oliver have happened to be in the house at the exact moment that Eugene's madness, and nothing else, mind you, had been discovered. Haugh ! Begad ! Haugh !

The rumour became whispered gradually into the appearance of the truth, with such intensity did it take hold upon the life of Dheel, and, as always happened in such cases, there was a passionate mind at the root of this lie's life.

Often it would seem that the shaping of an event, even such an event as this still unhappened one which was soon to flow out of the life of this place, like something oozed into accountable being at the end of long, quiet waves, had already known the joy of its telling in another story. And now people would suddenly be recounting in every place a story that had happened upon the Cummor side of Dheel, the quietest place in all the circle of the valley. Sometimes it suffered in the telling, but Seumas had opportunity to hear it so often and in so many different versions in Jamesey Ryan's that it had come to possess a certain balance and shapeliness, as he thought it over almost in spite of himself because of the increasing frequency with which it was brought to his mind.

. . . . . .

It came as a surprise to everyone in Cummor when Martha Higgins married Henry McDermott, for they had been expecting every day that it is married to James Lenihan she would be. No one had ever doubted this as the natural result of their long friendship, not even

their own two poor selves, and now it seemed that they were separated for ever. Of course, the constant presence of Henry McDermott with all his money and rich land had represented a certain menace, but they had never felt it through all the long, bright days of their love-making. They had always seemed so sure of one another, and even while James was doing his best to make her a home, she had been stolen from him by this Henry McDermott, this rich, proud man. The Higginses had managed the business very secretly and well. Martha never knew a word about it until all was settled. One sad evening her mother called her into the parlour, and, without very much beating about the bush, told her to prepare for her wedding day. . . . Martha's heart beat wildly, and the anguish gushed from her eyes. . . . She was to marry Henry McDermott, but her mind failed utterly to picture her husband to be. She saw only the handsome, decent countenance of James, the look of sorrow and anger in his eyes when she would have to tell him. . . . But it must be this way after all, after all they had talked and dreamt and planned through the long, idyllic evenings. It was her parents' wish, and there were young brothers and sisters to be given their chance in the world, too. Maybe James would understand. . . . But it would be hard since she herself did not seem to understand. . . . She saw her mother only dimly through a mist of tears, and the anxious voice seemed very far away as she went on to talk over the wonderful luck of the Higginses in getting a hold of such a great match as Henry McDermott. She broke wildly from the room before the bitter rain of her tears should drown her mother's comfort. Later she knew would be the dark, dramatic coming of the man and not the lover to whom she had been fated to give her life. There would be tea here in this musty, unfrequented room. After a satisfactory discussion of the marriage arrangements her father and

mother would be sure to excuse themselves and leave her alone with " himself " to be. . . . And then the little bright vision of all her life would darken down so sadly as she broke from the room in one last mad moment of rebellion. And what a dreadful night of anguish would come to her as she stood staring vacantly into the little looking-glass in her room, and remained there binding and unbinding her hair.

This evening passed even as she had foreseen, and next evening she told James. It was a sorrowful moment when they leaned across an old lichened wall to say, what little there was left, to one another. The rich sunlight of the Irish evening was more dearly lined with romance than ever, as it made more beautiful patterns upon the green upholstery of the grey stones. The word she had to say was final to both of them as the day of judgment. Their lives had always been so perfectly confined within the codes of the fields. He did not argue with her, he did not beseech her, he did not ask her wildly to break the mean chains which bound them to this place. There came a great dumbness upon them as they accepted their tragedy, and then they began to babble old love words to one another until all the stars had broken out in the young summer sky.

Next week she married Henry McDermott.

James Lenihan was a lonely, forlorn man from that day onward. It was peculiar, they said, how he never minded any other girl after he had been robbed of his love by the riches of Henry McDermott. It was not good for a man to be fretting himself into " a kind of decline like," but often they would see him brooding by the old wall where he had been accustomed to meet Martha Higgins. And yet in all else he was what you would call a model man—good and industrious and

doing well. He would soon, maybe, be nearly as fine a match for any poor girl as Henry McDermott. But was it not a pity that he had not set himself up so well before his girl had been taken away from him? But maybe, after all, some comely lassie, without a penny in the world, would set her cap at him, and all would yet be well with James Lenihan. But they never saw into his mind. They never heard the things he would be saying to himself for ever, as he stood by the old wall. . . . And how could they ever guess what his thoughts were as he sometimes gazed over the rich fields and allowed his eyes to dwell for long spaces at a time upon the lovely house of which Martha was now mistress? And how could they ever say over again, for the delight of their own curiosity, what his mind would say to itself as he often saw Martha driving proudly by the road in any of the fine vehicles with which Henry McDermott made a parade of his wealth and pride. Yet maybe he never thought or said anything to himself, for had not the marriage of Martha cut a wide and deep gulf between them for ever?

Sometimes, however, they detected some of his hidden thought in a thing he would say whenever people were discussing marriages, or matches, or the like, in his hearing:

"For every man there is one woman only, and if they marry, well and good, it's surely for the best; but if they don't, maybe that's for the best, too. The man should never be bothering his head with another."

They all said always that that was very true, of course; but they would have liked to say, although they did not, for fear of hurting his feelings, that he should not be bothering himself with her that was gone either. . . .

Martha had been now a few years married to Henry McDermott when the word began to run round the fields that he was not treating her exactly as a husband should. It seemed to stir James Lenihan out of what

was his mere trance of remembrance. He was like a man distraught, even as he went about his labour in the fields, and in the evenings a fierce look of anger burned in his dark eyes. The increasing rumours became a terrible torture to him. Then came the day when she was seen going the road no more, and the word went round that she was very ill in the grand house beyond the fields. They wondered what would James Lenihan do now, but he did nothing—even as he had done nothing when he had been robbed of Martha Higgins. He did nothing that was any explanation of his mind to them. Even on the day she died they said : " God help him," that it would turn him queer in his mind ; and some went so far as to say that he might forget her, now that she was no more.

The story of Henry McDermott's cruelty to his wife, which became firmly established in the neighbourhood, was heard very quietly by James Lenihan. He did not need to have been told it. He had felt it all the while as he stood by the old wall in the lonely evenings. But whenever he saw Henry McDermott now there was a dark glower in his eye which, those who observed it knew, boded no good thing at all. They could never get him to talk, and that appeared always the very worst sign in a place where everyone talked of their intentions and their affairs—in fact, made themselves seen as in a looking-glass. They were left without a notion of what James Lenihan might do, and it was a thing that worried them a great deal. They soon forgot the rumours that had arisen around Henry McDermott after the death of his wife, for it is not in the nature of the world to be remembering things against a rich man. The Higginses had not prospered through their alliance with Henry McDermott, and it was said that James

Lenihan, the poor, good-natured fellow, sometimes went over the fields to extend the help of his advice, and maybe of his money too, to the troublesome, worthless family. It must be something terrible, the love he had had for Martha, they said, when they saw him doing this—a thing they had never known anyone to do before. They said surely that he was married to her memory, and that it certainly was a case of one woman only with him.

But as time passed they saw that it was not this case with Henry at all, and no wonder, for he had not the heart of James, although he had the money. Aye, he had the money, more money than ever now. It was the thing that made them forget although it made him remember all the more in the very sadness of the thought that it should make them forget. It was the thing that had made the Higginses forget all James might have been to Martha if only they had not been so blind. Aye, it blinded people, too, and deafened their ears to the sound of two lovely souls crying out for one another through the dark.

And now James was seeing something which made his eyes wild and his heart wild and his mind wild. Henry McDermott was looking for another wife. Looking for another woman the widower was after being married already to his Martha, and it was not right for a man but to have one woman only. He, too, was a fine, marriageable man, with a way of life that might come to be as good in time as Henry McDermott's, and so it was not strange that these two should find themselves involved in the old complication once more. This time it was the desire of the Conroys to form a proud, advantageous alliance for their eldest daughter that had determined it. They had looked far around, and seen that the two men represented between them the best chance that their daughter or themselves through her would ever get. The people of the fields are knowing

people, not far in their thoughts at any time from the very roots of human nature, and realised that their plans might be best accomplished by endeavouring to re-create the romance which had darkened all the life of James Lenihan, and made a black enmity between him and Henry McDermott. It was a good beginning, anyway, to have the rumour sent around that Henry McDermott was looking after their daughter, Sarah. Of course, it was upon James Lenihan that they had really set their eyes, for he was nearly as good a match as Henry McDermott, and a much more decent man. They were interested to know and observe the anxiety with which the rumours seemed to affect the man who had lost his first love, how it seemed of a sudden to draw him out of his trance of desolation. Sarah was a very nice girl, and he had always spoken very friendly to her as she went the road. There was a chance of his robbing Henry McDermott now as Henry McDermott had robbed him in the days gone by. Not, of course, that they expected the gross, rich man to be affected just as he had been affected, but it would look like that to the people of the place who remembered and had expected, very probably, that James would show more spirit in him than the way he had taken the marriage and her death and all.

There was a puzzling smile upon the face of James Lenihan all this time, and no one could imagine what was running through his mind at all. He had suddenly taken a queer fancy that was almost past understanding. There was a little lake which nestled in the bosom of the valley, and now the summer was bright upon it as it lay so quiet there between all the nests of farms which sloped down to the water's edge. And now James Lenihan, who had never enjoyed himself, used to take his pleasure here in the evenings. He had bought a boat and used to go rowing and fishing here when all the people of the fields would be talking, probably about him, as well as all the others, after the day's labours.

His unaccountable turn to this solace had the effect of putting him further and further beyond them. They could not well explain what had come over him, unless that he had managed to forget, managed to put her, at last, out of his mind after all the many years that his mind had been ploughed by his torment. And it was hardly likely that he would want to be filling his mind with fancies of another girl. The Conroys did not know what to think. But he was watching and knowing and planning. Often one passing by the lake would hear him laughing strangely to himself out there upon the silent, glassy waters.

Then something happened which upset all calculations, especially those of the Conroys, who had only succeeded so far in attracting the eye of Henry McDermott, although in this they had progressed to a considerable intensity. The rumour had gained such very strong currency, indeed, that it might in the end effect a certain compulsion towards marriage, for the power of talk is of great significance among the people of the fields. Henry McDermott did not seem to mind. Maybe he would marry her and maybe he would not. If he took it into his head nothing would stop him, and if he did not, well, the Conroys would not be able to sneeze at him, for was he not Henry McDermott? Maybe he, too, had enough in one woman only, and sure, they said that he had treated Martha badly. Now had come this surprising thing which left everyone without a word in their mouths. *Henry McDermott and James Lenihan had become friends.* No one seemed to know how it had come about or why. James, through the strange thing that had embittered life, was a silent, enigmatic man, and the force of Henry's money had always hedged him around by a certain aloofness. But there was the wonder every evening before their eyes—Henry McDermott sailing the little lake from the high evening far

into dusk and darkness. Now, what could anyone say in face of a thing like that? Yet things were still said —about James that it was a shame entirely to go give in and forget like that after what Henry had done to him—about Henry that as sure as day he was going to marry Sarah Conroy. This was particularly at the instigation of the Conroys, who thought that this way their only hope lay. Yet all their talking and all the talk which they helped to create had no great effect for their good, in fact no great effect at all beyond foreshadowing the nature of the event which might yet happen between the two men sailing upon the little lake in the summer evenings. James had heard only the rumours of the proposed marriage, and as the ears as well as the eyes of his mind were a good deal blinded he did not figure every possible aspect of the matter, and least of all its impossibility, for he never spoke of the matter to his friend, Henry. Their talk was always upon light, happy things as they went laughing down the laughing waters.

The summer had begun to wane, and soon the evening's darkness would put them off the waters, everyone said, and then their tongues would have to turn to some other aspect of these two, or to something else, in search of material for their amusement. As a kind of final word, they said that when the turn of the season brought to an end his curious, boyish prank with James Lenihan, Henry would marry Sarah Conroy, and then all would be quiet again in the fields. Maybe, they added, he would have James himself as best man at the marriage—indeed, who else could he select, and they so friendly now, and wouldn't that be grand, everybody said, for it would surely appear as a fitting way of putting the seal on their friendship for evermore.

The last evening they intended to spend upon the water was cold and windy, and the little lake was lashed into a passion, upon its customarily so quiet face.

They would not spend long upon the lake this evening, although it was the last. They would just sail up the lake, and leave the boat at anchor in the shed which jutted over the water at the further shore. Henry made some remarks about the heavy stones with rings in them lying at the bottom of the boat. James said that these would be needed. Henry made some other further remark about other strange gear that was lying beside them, and wondered would it be needed, too. But the wind drowned the voice of James if he replied at all. . . . Soon they were at the middle of the lake, the deepest part. Henry suddenly turned back to gaze at something far up the windy fields. . . . It was the opportunity of all James's life. He let the oar drop, picked up something from the bottom of the boat, and in a terrible moment there upon the very deepest part of the lake his whole being seemed to sing in ecstasy to the blow. . . . Henry fell instantly, and the blood pouring from his head out over the edge of the boat commingled almost cunningly with the dark waters. The horrible, quiet plan of James Lenihan's warped and saddened mind had come to the conclusion of all its quiet planning. It seemed almost horrible to think that it was a great love that had brought a fine man to this awful ghastliness. . . . But he was not yet at an end of the ecstasy of slaughter that had come upon him. He was down on his knees at the bottom of the boat placing the heavy weights about the ankles. He would throw him over here, for here was the very deepest spot. He had measured it with plummet and line. . . . There was no chance of Henry McDermott marrying Sarah Conroy now. . . . After all he, too, would have had only one woman in his life. "One woman only, one woman only!" he muttered most mournfully as the waters closed over the head of the man he had killed. . . . Welling slowly into his consciousness was the thought that no secret thing had

ever yet been effected here in Dheel. They would know. . . . There were many who would have extended their curiosity to them in this evening, too. They would surely guess. . . . A man like Henry McDermott, a notable man, could not be done away with in a hurry like that. . . . It was curious how a man's cleverest plans blinded him sometimes. He could not think like this or see things just like this an hour ago. Oh, God! this was growing to be such a dark and fearful night. It was a night that any man might meet his death. . . . It would be horrible to think, even if he escaped, that the Conroys might be thinking of him as a match for their daughter, now that they had lost all chance of Henry McDermott. He who had never wanted the mention even of more than one woman in his life. One woman only. . . . One woman only.

It was darker over the water now and he had not yet reached the boat-shed. . . .

. . . . . .

And often Seumas would remain gazing out over where this story was written on his mind to some far spot of his life where, in obedience to a whim of the fields, the like of this had happened all over again.

CHAPTER IV

As if through power of some fine compassion induced by the whisper that was gathering around them, Oliver and Breedh were passing into utter sympathy with one another. He would often stop as he went about his business upon the road and shout out some pleasantry to her where she would have just come to the door. . . . Perhaps a smile of understanding would then flow across the yard, enmeshed in a pregnant silence while she looked at the child and while he gazed far over the fields, as if the very air above them held still some wandering breath of the beauty of their young days in Dheel. . . . At last he had come to develop the habit of crossing over the yard occasionally, never to say very much to her, however, that the most lying tongue could gleefully construe to the purpose of a mean mind, but upon the most casual talk fell a wondrous intimacy passing almost into love words which flowed full of rich sympathy between them. . . . Now even these bright passages had been hurried into a dark silence by the vast shadow of the lie that was being reared up around them. Yet there seemed to be the same fondness in both their eyes always as they looked into the eyes of the little child. . . .

In Dheel they had a saying amongst others, all of which had a certain mean wisdom, that if one has the name one might as well have the gains. And such little observations, slight, perhaps, and almost as nothing in themselves, had, nevertheless, a big influence in shaping actions. Remembrance of this, snatched at as a comfort by these two, had the effect of driving them further and further into the retreat of one another. . . .

This, too, with the great loneliness which always

crept over the fields at the end of summer, the mournful moment when Nature, thinking, with a sense of relentless justice, of its own compensation, made men suffer for the wild, bright gladness they might have enjoyed here, but did not, at the noon of summer. So now Oliver was thinking more deeply than ever, in spite of all that had been said, of the joy and beauty which might have been his had he married Breedh. And so, even before the November evenings had begun to fall down heavily upon Dheel, he used to walk, with no great show of secrecy now, up the road and right into the house to speak out his heart to her on many things by the kitchen fire.

His purpose in doing this was conceived, of course, to be without much good in it, and held to be the biggest offence that Dheel had yet produced in the eyes of man. But in the eyes of Breedh and Oliver it held no evil, for it was but a part of Nature which Dheel had thwarted, yet, for all that, it might come to have an ending that would leave a dreadful mark across both their lives, a mark of sin, maybe, and the shame of sin, and the death of sin. Some kind of lonely pity was finer, surely, than any angry blaming. Day by day she sprang to dearer beauty in his eyes, while, day by day, the woman he had married declined from beauty, almost with the despondent hurry of a once bright leaf falling.

Fanny had taken, not without a certain pathos in the endeavour, to wearing, in an attempt, maybe, to recover the vanished comeliness she had once worn as a queen's garment in the eyes of another man, the gew-gaws and fineries she had brought with her from America. But her life and her beauty had been caught in the blast of a sudden withering which no artifice of earth could succeed in hiding. Yet she put on a certain sad grandeur as she moved about the poor ways of Dheel and Ballyscurlock, all richly adorned, for her being still flashed a bold allure before the eyes of Seumas Darcy

like some proud queen trampling upon the broken body of her murdered lover in the olden time.

Sometimes a thought would return to his mind of the evening when he had spoken so confidentially and in full friendliness with Oliver, as brothers almost, at the time the other had just suffered the defeat of his love. And there now was Oliver with his two women, his wife and another, to be near him always, his rapidly improving land, and maybe his skelp out of Eugene's, too, if the truth were known, while here was he, poor Shameen Darcy, an unfortunate cursed devil who had gone to school with the three of them, still a slave in Jamesey Ryan's of Ballyscurlock. He was beginning to turn gray, and in a few years he would be getting old, with no place and nothing done for himself, but only a disgrace to his people. . . . The proud feet of her could not trample him deeper into the dust and she passing by. . . . He had come at last to realise that there was no longer even a melancholy pleasure in falling further. He had known of older drunkards to " pull themselves together," even out of the muck of such a place as Jamesey Ryan's, to do the most marvellous things and become quite successful men. . . .

After a long, melancholy period of almost complete insensibility, entered, as it were, to give him courage, he at last steeled himself to the effort. One day he went up to Jamesey Ryan and made a kind of general confession. He declared quite plainly that if, there and then, he was given a rise in his salary equivalent in amount to the value of the drink he usually consumed he would turn himself into a man at once and begin to do his work like a Christian.

To his credit, it could be said that Jamesey Ryan was a man who always listened to reason, although it was more than middling hard to stand this account of all that had been robbed from him by a drunken ruffian. Yet even at the last he was glad to see this

sign of conversion, although his wits were sorely puzzled to guess what could have brought it about. Seumas seemed to assume much of his neighbours' outlook to himself, as in the days of his rehabilitation he realised how, just now, the man who had been so steady was now disgracing himself as everyone said, in a way that was far worse than drink. It was odious to see a married man spending the most of his time in the house of a woman whose poor husband, on the head of her badness of course, and nothing else, was raging mad in the lunatic asylum. Seumas gloated with some delight upon the circumstances of Oliver's downfall. He saw all the movement of it with the eyes of a mind that was clear for the first time in a great many years, and perhaps refilled largely with its native meanness. The Growneys did not seem to care a great deal about the way everyone said that their daughter was going on. So long as it gave them a better opportunity to pull more and more out of the place it was little or none of their business. Then something happened which seemed to spoil all this thing which in one aspect of regard stood for love, in another for gain, and in yet another for exultation. It was one of the circumstances which but seldom flowed in from the outer world to bear upon the life of Dheel. When Eugene Gavacan had been packed off to the asylum the Growneys had laboured under somewhat of a misapprehension as to who was to pay for him. They had a vague, hopeful notion that the cost would be borne by the ratepayers of the county. But just now, after repeated applications, the asylum authorities in Mullaghowen were about to sue for the cost of the lunatic's maintenance, which had remained unpaid by anyone. The arrears were long and considerable, and as the wife's family had already embarked upon various ambitious adventures it would not be very easy to have to pay all down in a lump sum. Besides, this annuity,

for the upkeep of the owner of what now was their most valuable possession, if once established must continue into the years.

It was, indeed, a distressing situation, which called, of its very nature, for some treatment in the way of advice from the wise man of Dheel, from old Andy Giveney himself. So Andy was called in to consult with the Growneys upon the matter. At first he seemed all for taking the madman out of the asylum at once and risking it, so as to defeat the grasping authorities at all costs. " The dirty ascendancy drop is in them," he said, " and the inclination to badness."

A tentative move was made in this direction, only to be countered most unexpectedly by the asylum authorities in offering to deliver up Eugene if anyone would agree to guarantee his safe keeping. Thus were the Growneys given a skelp of their own stick. It was an awkward moment in which Andy strove boldly to speak words of comfort :

" All the same, it's no bad move, d'ye mind ? Eugene was a great butt of a man, and the land has a kind of disimproved 'ithout his assistance. But, sure, d'ye see, he'll be a sort of a class of an idiot now, and it'll be as easy as how-are-ye to make a fool of him. Sure, he'll never be able to see all yous are after lifting from or intend to lift from him in the coming time, and he'll be the devil's own character at labouring now that the sinews is mad for exercise after that long spell of idleness in the asylum."

Not a thought of Breedh even now, just as there never had been a word that gave her any say in the bargain, although her bright body was still young with lovely life and still she was fair to look upon. But it was something for which to be thankful that Oliver Moyles was always thinking of her fondly.

CHAPTER V

Upon his return from the asylum Eugene Gavacan was no longer the man whom any of them had previously known. His period of retreat seemed to stand for a dark blank in his life, which meant as well a lapse into utter stupidity, a mental and spiritual hiatus standing almost for complete obliteration of his personality. He was a man who had taken great pride in his farm, its appointments being, as it were, a part of his life. And now when he saw the neglect that had overtaken everything, the waste, the lack of sympathy in the minds and hands of those who had tended this place in his absence, he knew the sadness of one who sees his little conception of beauty destroyed. A certain moroseness, a blank gloominess which would be forever breaking out in lone sobs of vexation, was the state of mind into which he now passed. Some wild circumstance of the land had made him an afflicted man. . . . He had, of course, no true realisation of why he had been sent to the asylum. But the tradition of the fields working in his mind was compelling him. Even his attempts at realisation were rigidly phrased in this tradition, for occasionally when he would meet Andy Giveney on one of his rambles around his fields the ancient man would drop words as always out of his life-long obsession, and Eugene would begin to think that the period he had lived away from the fields was one of suffering in jail for his native country, a piece of martyrdom for a lovely bit of the land of Ireland. Contrary to the expectation of Andy he did not put on any " great whet of work," but the way into which his mind was being turned was proving most unaccountably serviceable to the plans of the Growneys. The thought

of ruination in the tradition of those unhappy circumstances which linked the tragedy of any little corner of the fields with the tragedy of the nation grew further into the unhealthy consciousness of Eugene towards the taking of more firm root. It seemed that he must go the whole way, and do what every man like him had ever done. The pubs of Ballyscurlock had always called the men who had broken their lives after this fashion, and so he had turned to spending many of his days in Jamesey Ryan's.

Yes, here was this once fine farmer, Eugene Gavacan, coming into this place, as it were, to atone for himself, endeavouring almost with a certain pathos to overcome a natural affliction in relating himself as best he might to a certain futility of the fields. In going into the room at the back of the shop whose atmosphere was determined as it were by the pictures of Charles Stewart Parnell and William Ewart Gladstone which occupied pride of place, he was making himself a figure of defeated Irish patriotism. It was here he was mostly to be seen every day, talking the most ferocious nonsense about those who had put him in jail, the implication of guilt for this flowing around him continuously in the room where he drank and raved. The man who came most often to attend him in his affliction was Seumas Darcy, who already realised the extent often, because he, too, had lived the like of this as a prologue, fortunately, and not as an epilogue. But the sense of contrast here created was as balm to his mind, investing him almost with a sense of power. Consequent upon his amendment of himself the meanness of Dheel and Ballyscurlock had entered into him fully, making him think spitefully, and in terms of revenge, of those whom his mind had already visioned to his heart as enemies. Oliver Moyles, for instance, was first and foremost. He could say no good thing of this man now. His encounters with the madman in the room of agrarian gloom afforded encourage-

ment to his enmity. Occasionally the conversation would hush down to a fierce whisper.

"Watch that fellow, Eugene, I'm telling you. Watch him!"

"Yes, yes, I will, I will!" So out of a state of mind thus enforced came the situation of Eugene, standing darkly every day at his own door at the time when Oliver would be passing about his business upon the road. Here inevitably another aspect of antagonism was developed, for Oliver felt that the pleasant moments he had been having with Breedh were finally impossible for him now.

There was something else which seemed to gather the darkling clouds ever closer around this place and around these people. The little boy, Oweneen, the son of the enforced marriage, was beginning to toddle about, and it was very extraordinary, indeed, that the eyes of all the figures in this sad complication were now upon this little child, each pair of eyes for different reasons.

Here was this crying, dribbling, foolish thing, having yet of itself no grip upon life, now holding, almost with full, definite power in its little soft hands, a grip upon others that was almost awful in its significance. It was its young, weak life that determined the movement of the lives which fluttered around it. Its face was changing, the sadness of all life manifesting itself in this aspect of change. Little Oweneen had the look no longer of Oliver as seen through the eyes of Breedh. Already with the fall of time upon his young head he had begun to put on the look of his father, Eugene. The madman saw this, and it pleased him to the extent of causing him to focus all his mind on the child. It was made certain by this absorption in his son that whatever his madness might make him do it must inevitably involve little Oweneen. The childless woman living down the road, poor Fanny Soraghan, would sometimes forget all her suffering in a wild burst of longing for

motherhood, and catch up little Oweneen in her arms and kiss him wildly where he might have wandered out to the road and she passing.

Whenever Eugene would speak of the child in the shop it was the thing that continually made Seumas all the more fiercely remember the childless woman, Fanny, his lost love. All this had gradually the effect of creating around the child, subconsciously, a sense of importance that was of itself unhealthy. It was responsible for a certain precocious wilfulness which made its manner different from the usual disposition of childhood, causing it to do the strangest things, whether it was in the company of its father or not. In the minds of the dispassionate neighbours it was far too " old-fashioned " for its years.

Seumas Darcy would by times feel himself growing a very master of the circumstances which had gone to shape many of the facts of his life, the dreams he had had once, and the black thoughts of revenge which filled him now. He was master of Eugene, as strongly powerful of influence over this man as anyone with a purpose could well wish to be. He would smile out of the delight and satisfaction that stirred him whenever he heard Eugene say a thing like this which would sound half a fact, half a mad invention :

" Come over here till I pull up my breeches, Shameen, and show you the quare big bite the young chiseller, Oweneen, gave me th'other day. We were playing dogs in the haggard, lepping on top of one another, and all around the haycocks, when, be the holy, what d'ye think but he sunk his two teeth right into me in proper earnest, and like everything else when it gets the taste of the blood, he was ferocious for more on the instant minute. . . . Who d'ye think was passing the road and I just after getting the dart and screeching with the pain only Oliver Moyles, and I hating the sight of him and the ground he walks on.

"'Good dog!' says I. 'Good dog! Bite him! Bite him!' And what d'ye think, didn't the little lad run like a weasel down the road after Oliver, and he'd have bit a big lump out of his calf only Breedhyeen Growney ran after her own child, be the way, and it her fancy man she was after all the time. It was a quare kind of disappointment to me, this in particular, and I still screeching."

"Yes, yes, that's a good one, Eugene. Isn't it curious to think of her saving him like that, and he an offence against humanity, as you might say, by attempting such tricks."

"He's all that. I say he's all that, Shameen."

"Well, you're a funny, man to be letting the likes of it go on. Don't you know very well that at this present moment and you here in your affliction, a second Parnell nearly, and you after being in jail on account of your land, they're back in the house, begad, and they carrying on.

Then the madman would go forth raging from this house of gloom. Coming up towards Dheel he would be more than likely to come upon Andy Giveney looking, as it were, in the most unconcerned way out over the fields of Dheel, forever brooding there, the unquiet, evil spirit of the lonely fields.

"Good morrow, Eugene! And how are you, my decent man? I'm more than glad to see you. I'm just after being having a squint out over your land. And d'ye know, it's a kind of pitiful. That's the only word for it, pitiful. D'ye know what it is now? While you were suffering in jail, when you'd nearly imagine that they'd have shown some kind of spunk, them damn Growneys robbed you, the same time Oliver Moyles was almost living in the house entire. D'ye know now, it's an odious grand thing to be one of the completely dispossessed. Mebbe it's what I'm damnable lucky, after all, in having neither the one thing nor the other, neither the wife nor the land, to bother about,"

Old Andy would have just bared his yellow fangs so that he might the better suck at the terrible, meaningless glee which absorbed him. Yet it was an expression of his purpose here as minister of the immense cruelty which was hidden deep in the black heart of the land. In the movement of Eugene away from him there would be a gesture of the resolve that had already begun to fill the madman. He would think nothing of murdering Oliver now, but in this connection a curious qualm of caution overshadowed his insanity, almost with the power of a wide and fine protection. It might mean a return to the asylum, to his jail which had separated him so long from the lovely land, a time of denial of the black, fierce love which from infancy had been flowing over in his mind from the wild creative power of Andy Giveney. So, with the cunning of the insane, a horrible plan had already begun to be raised up in him. Through the imaginary incident of the dog-play in the haggard he had already seen how his little son might come to be of assistance. It was now autumn, when in the brightest moments of sunlight a touch of summer's glory returned to gild all fondly the fields of Dheel. But not long past the height of noontide there would be shadows creeping and falling. . . . Crowding unseen far over the white stubbles there would be a brave crowd of fallen leaves assembled in celebration of great days that were past, but with the hurrying, whispering urgency of crowds which knew well that soon they must be going. At evening time it was the season of half-lights and mists which would rise out of the fields of Dheel to enfold all lovingly the little life of this place. It was a most wondrous thing to be alive amid this quiet scene wherein all life appeared to be so infinitely hushed to still the faintest sound of lamentation.

And, absenting himself from the joys of Ballyscurlock Eugene spent most of his days out here with his little son in a field of stubbles from which the stacks of oats had not yet been removed. They were now indulging

in even more dangerous amusement than dog-play, for a shiny, steel thing sometimes gleamed between them. . . . The thought that this weapon had been suffered to remain with him seemed almost criminal, yet a man of the standing which Eugene Gavacan had even still could always successfully bribe the sergeant with " a few bags of spuds " or some other present of the kind. And so the gun was hidden in a hole dug deeply and warmly lined for the purpose in this field where his oat-crop of the year had grown.

Each day that they came here they would go through an extraordinary performance. Eugene would very deliberately take down a couple of sheaves from a stack, and, carrying them to a wide, open space, would place them close together, commingling them almost lovingly, profusion and yield into yield and profusion, like lip to lip and being to being. Then excitedly he would hurry his little son apart and shout :

" Who's that, Oweneen ? Who's them ? "

With the glibness of one who had been taught the answers the boy would repeat :

" Oliver Moyles and Breedhyeen Growney ! " Not even " my mother," but " Breedhyeen Growney " derisively, belittlingly.

" Now, take the gun, Oweneen, like a good fellow, and we'll have a shot at the pair."

Then the little fellow, who was just barely able to lift up the gun, would aim at the sheaves, and more often than not blow them to pieces.

They had already destroyed a whole fine stack of oats and wasted innumerable cartridges at this game, but the germ of Eugene's intention had been well implanted in the mind of the child.

There was even deeper cunning evident in the extension and final completion of his plan. Eugene went over the fields one fine evening to Lowry Pigeon, the tailor, with the materials under his arm, in a big parcel, of the best suit that money could buy at Stanley's,

" the high-class drapers," in Castleconnor. It was one of the worst troubles of Lowry Pigeon's life, this way that Eugene Gavacan would come so often with the makings of a suit. " And the shiny mad smile of him and the ruffian going to burn it, mebbe, in a week or two. I hate the living sight of him coming in the door." This to his wife, Ellen, in the hope of wifely sympathy.

" But, sure, when he pays you, and a special fee in addition for expensive pearl buttons to the coat, where's the use in you making the poor mouth to me about it, Lowry ? "

" But all the same, when I feel the grand stuff going through my hands and the pride of the artist rising up in me as I do my endeavours with it after the fashion of a conscientious man, it nearly goes to my heart. Think of me, for instance, expending my ingenuity on a buttonhole that results only in him seeing the beauty of it by burning it for the button that went into it, mebbe, only a few times. He's a sartorial sacrilege. God Almighty be praised, I'm a fairly Christian man, but I often feel like breaking his lunatic's neck, Ellen."

So on this evening Eugene Gavacan bore down upon Lowry with the calculated precision of something inevitable. He went up through his field of oat stubbles on the way to his tailor in Glounasrow. He paused for a while near the ruins of the stack that had afforded himself and his gossoon such fine, exciting sport. A wild smile lit up the hairless portion of his face just around his eye before he hitched his big parcel more securely under his arm and resumed his dogged walk head downcast. He went on muttering queerly where the weak autumn sunlight seemed to bestow a last benediction of gold upon the dying hedgerows. He laughed to himself as he thought of the things he would say to Lowry Pigeon and the things that Lowry Pigeon would say to him. It was a form of fun that he dragged out of his *grummock* fields.

CHAPTER VI

Still full of cunning Eugene had given out the word that his reason in getting a new suit now, after all the many suits he had burned, was that he might go off in decency to visit some people of his own in Kiloolagh, a distant village miles and miles beyond Castleconnor. He managed to produce the impression that he had been conspiring about this visit for a long time with Andy Giveney. His cousins in Kiloolagh were, like himself, of the farming class, and it was natural enough to think that he should thus fortify himself very suitably with the company of a man so learned, so deeply enthusiastic of the land. And Eugene displayed, too, the consolation of fatherly pride in the proposal to bring the child, Oweneen, who had already sprung into a fine lump of a gossoon. This touch of naturalism gave the whole adventure of the visit the appearance of sanity.

" Look at that now, the harmlessness and the decency of him ! "

" It is no wonder, indeed, for the poor fellow to be going to see his own after the way he's after been robbed by the clan he tied himself to."

They made a notable company, surely, as they drove out of the yard of the place, Eugene himself resplendent in the new suit which must soon go the way of all the fine suits that Lowry had made for him, Andy looking almost distinguished and patriotic in the well-preserved Caroline hat and frieze cut-away coat of a bygone generation, the youngster, Oweneen, in a grand, new sailor suit with brassy buttons and a whistle hung by a white silken cord around his neck, and a shiny brassy anchor fully evident upon everything that he wore, even

upon the cap, which bore in addition the legend, "H. M. S. Courageous." Eugene cracked his whip almost with a screech of joy, and his luxuriant, handsome beard blew proudly back upon the wind like the mane of a lion, as they set off upon their journey. . . . He was immediately interested in everything that stood for even the most meagre interest along the way they were going, after the fashion of one in a grand, contented frame of mind. He broke out even into bursts of whistling and singing, although to-day the birds were silent, with the first silence of winter, all down by the fields of Dheel. . . . He told Andy, almost with very affectionate confidence in tones of the finest admiration, that it surpassed all that he knew about every cursed thing connected with the land.

There was a certain almost lonely sadness flowing out from the late autumn day. The last rich gold was passing out in a succession of tones which seemed to fade more sadly deep from moment to moment and far down into the grey of winter. . . . It soon became a battle between their mood of brightness and this darkness which was falling, falling. . . . There fell long silences, broken only by little, excited screeches from Oweneen at things by the roadside which were strange to his young, wild eyes and caught his fancy. They drew down long hills, and at last, as if by a great mercy, came upon Darrigan's of Glinnan. He must have been a wise man, surely, who built him a pub here at this confluence of roads. He must have been a psychologist well versed in and well able to account for all the varying moments of the fields. Thus in spring, summer, autumn or winter this prosperous pub at the cross-roads held its separate and seasonable appeal. . . . And now upon this autumn day it seemed to call to them more loudly than ever. In fact, there was no denying its invitation. They excused their acceptance, and immediately hurried all scruples away by saying to one

another that it would not be right but to break the journey somehow for sake of the horse and the child. They drove into the yard with fine deliberation, Eugene looking a remarkable devil of a stranger to the " habituals " of Darrigan's of Glinnan who were lounging around. It was a striking sort of thing to see two well-dressed men and a gossoon coming in to drink like this almost as one might be inclined to say, in " the heat of the day," although there were cold winds blowing in little, whirling blasts from far over all the fields which sloped down to Darrigan's of Glinnan. . . . They knew upon the instant that a wide mood of generosity was upon the man with the great beard, that no man with the " whet " under him that Eugene wore just presently could possibly refrain from standing a drink. In anticipation they shuffled into the bar, and began expectantly to develop wide smiles of welcome. Immediately Eugene came amongst them and arose to their expectations by doing the decent man. Mrs. Darrigan, with all the force of her sixteen stone behind it, beamed out a smile upon the newcomers, for she was in a position to know that nobody else in the crowd had any money, she having, through power of her quality as Mrs. Darrigan of Glinnan come into possession of it all. But now delight returned to her with the hubbub of the business of drinking which Eugene proceeded to create by throwing out pound notes upon the counter every five minutes or so. Andy was soon translated outrageously into his mood of memorising. He was dribbling and screeching and wheezing out his very best stories.

" Your sowl ! " Eugene would roar upon each succeeding bar of the story, and strike the ancient man on the chest, almost to the extent of knocking him backwards on the drink-spewn floor. Then he, by way of a variation of his enthusiasm, would strike him on the back, causing him to cough up again the grand

" Very Old Malt " or " Three Star " whiskey he had only just drunk. . . . Once at a story of Andy's about one of the Marlays he had struck him on the nose, causing it to spout blood, which necessitated a hurried rush of everyone in the place out into the yard with Andy in their arms. . . . Thereafter the symposium grew quieter and more deliberate. It flowed more evenly upon round after round of drink, broken only by visit after visit to the yard. Sometimes one of the stories that had begun in the shop would be concluded in the yard, or in one of the stables, an angry, gesticulating crowd of men falling over one another in either place. Drink always seemed to have a most extraordinary effect upon Eugene, merely turning his mind inwardly to feed upon its own flame, and thus making him really more mad if outwardly more sober. . . . Andy went on to develop his theme, plunging further and further into the vehemence which lent his villainy the atonement of its gesture, and illuminated his irrelevance with some show of meaning. His old, light body would lurch drunkenly against the counter from time to time. All this time little Oweneen had been playing about their legs and looking up into their faces with puzzled eyes which reflected a mind that was striving to find a meaning in their wild words. His father had bought him " peggy's leg " and cakes and port wine. His face and hands were besmeared by the sticky sweetstuff, and his eyes were wild like the eyes of the rest of them. The excitement began rapidly to fall upon the downward curve from its highest point. And as always befalls in the casual, adventurous way of a pub, something happened now to lift it up again. A man now came into the bar, whose appearance held the distress of hurry and excitement and evidence of the fact that he had just been cycling.

He stood for a moment in a detached corner, and ordered a bottle of ginger ale. Then suddenly in that

intense, almost subconscious, way of the pub, he broke upon them and they on him. . . . They mutually became disclosed. The man was Seumas Darcy and they the average drunken crowd that he knew so well. It was like the wild night he had met the timbermen in Castleconnor, when he had still been in the other phase of himself. And he was now drinking ginger ale. Yet it might seem that it was the curious affection surviving always between a man and the thing he has most reason to hate which held him in its regard still. He could not have passed this publichouse now, no matter at what cost to himself, and they knew this, and he himself knew that this must be the way of shopboys always. There was an old saying, " Once a peeler always a peeler." By implication it embodied his explanation, too.

But there was no time for speculation one way or another this evening, for he had come here on definite business. His purpose was replete with the self-possession of the new man that he had become. . . . He stood a drink to the crowd, for, naturally, he possessed a shrewd appreciation of the codes of the publichouse. . . . Then he beckoned Eugene aside, and in a few moments would appear to be engaged in quite exciting conversation. Out from the dark nook of the shop where they remained speaking the fire flowed wildly from the light brown eye of Eugene. He pulled at his beard continuously, as he seemed to struggle further and further into himself. . . . He nodded his head in agreement from moment to moment, and the others did not seem to have any idea what they could be talking about. Besides, these were now all too drunk, and were without scarcely any show of life save perhaps Andy Giveney, who had flung his drink upon the ground in angry remembrance of the way that Seumas had once treated him and he in the very height and splendour of his memorising. . . . Immediately a last fierce round was added by Eugene—glasses of malt for

everyone, and then they stumbled pell-mell into the yard to yoke the horse, for he had declared his intention of returning instead of proceeding upon his journey to Kiloolagh. . . . Disappointment crept in upon them as they were told this, for Eugene was after being "horrid" decent. Yet hope rose wildly again, for along the road that he had come to them as a blessing out of Heaven they now heard another horse and yoke being driven wildly. . . . They were all eyes and ears until the contrivance and its passenger dashed into the yard. It was a woman that they saw jumping down off the car, and this of itself was sufficient to frighten them, because it might be his unfortunate wife coming all the way from home for the decent man. . . . They began to scamper wildly into the sheds and into the pub. A woman could scarcely be coming thus to drink, but yet the manner of her entrance to the yard was almost that of a man coming here deliberately for this purpose. . . . It was Fanny, the wife of Oliver. Eugene and Seumas, from the place where they had been talking, were amazed by this inexplicable arrival. Even Seumas was somewhat stunned by it. There was something thrilling in this moment which flashed him back, his blood making his heart rush dancing to the memory of young, bright days. This, surely, was the Fanny he had known with all that was finest in his heart and mind, and now it seemed that he could know her again, although she was the wife of Oliver. It seemed that something bright and warm had of a sudden leaped up around him here in the yard. . . . Seumas walked over and took the head of the horse, just as if nothing of anger or the sorrow of shattered love had ever happened between them. The wife of Oliver called Eugene aside and spoke with him. And the same wild smile came across his face upon the meagre portions of it that were still beardless. He rushed upon Andy and Oweneen, and whisked the two of them up

into the car. . . . Then, quietly, Fanny came over and spoke to Seumas as the others drove wildly out of the yard.

" It was right," she said, " to tell poor Eugene. I'm glad in my heart, so I am, that I'm after doing it this blessed day."

" Musha, sure, when the hard word was dropped by someone from Dheel coming in to drink in the shop, I instantaneously got the day off from Ryan and came here as fast as the old bicycle could carry me. I could not bear to think of him insulting you like that by being above in the house with Breedh and Eugene away."

They seemed to be surrounded now by the common impulse of the thing that both had done, and their words and actions flowed into one another to make their every thought and action almost simultaneous as each hung tremulously upon the consciousness of the other. But their thought or movement was outwardly enforced by the scene in which they had been thrown together after all their long period of separation. Momentarily it appeared to Seumas and with a great bitterness in the thought, that it must always be the same scene. . . . His hope crept downward in a swift instant full of fear of her, although they were moving almost arm in arm in the direction of the tap-room of Darrigan's of Glinnan. It was here that he must tell her of his love once more while she took the port wine that he would presently " stand " to her, and himself a temperance drink, a piece of behaviour that must surely surprise her into a finer regard. She seemed to move with less of passion urging her now. And it was almost as two weak and defeated souls that they sat down beside one another upon the old settee with the broken springs which was the most notable piece of furniture in the tap-room.

Mrs. Darrigan came in answer to his knock upon the partition which separated the tap-room from the bar.

It was a pity that this had to be, for immediately their singing, leaping mood was stilled and entrapped in the look that Mrs. Darrigan gave them. She was no neighbour of theirs, knowing everything about them to the very last thought in their minds, but now, immediately, she seemed to know. Fanny felt the piercing power of the shrewd look from beneath the knitted brows, and her very soul was ashamed. But Seumas did not fall so suddenly out of his exaltation, yet it was not with the great feeling of triumph he had imagined for himself in this moment, should it come, that he ordered the drink for himself and her. Mrs. Darrigan moved out of the room, and they looked at one another, a great depth of sorrow opening up in their eyes. But in their gaze was a proud clearness, too, and they saw one another truly as each stood now. . . . Yet it was pitiful, indeed, this mutual message of their eyes. What better any longer were they than Oliver or Breedh? So long as they had thought of one another distantly all had been beautiful, but now this new morning of their minds was overcast by sadness. And this was maybe because they were fainter spirits, never knowing the full truth of life that all joy and beauty springs from. They had never snatched at the reality of the moment and clasped it firmly in both hands, all else for evermore being but folly and filled to the brim with the sorrow of the dream that dies.

Fanny, her eyes all glistening with the bitter tears her pride would not allow her to shed, had arisen, and was now drawing her wrap closer about her preparatory to leaving the room. Her every movement was hurried, nervous, communicating its intensity of defeat to him. With a last gasp of anguish, it would seem, from both she was gone. . . . Mrs. Darrigan, perhaps still feeling the righteous contempt for both that she had already shown, had not returned with the drinks. . . . So the wide stillness in which Seumas stood was unbroken. . . .

And he could hear the sound of the car being driven rapidly out of the yard. . . .

Oh, God, she was gone from him now, after being so very near in a flickering instant of great joy. Already he could hear the sound of the car where it had gained the high road. He rushed out, breaking over every obstacle in his way, even his own bicycle, which stood against a porter-barrel with its wheel extending into his path. Having reached the road he paused wildly, but the woman retreating from him had vanished round the turn, and he could hear the hum of the wheels far down the road.

CHAPTER VII

Oliver Moyles, working early this day down in the detached field at Cruckenerega, saw the intimate little company pass gladly in the trap away in the direction of Kiloolagh. The rumour of the expedition had already run around the fields of Dheel, so he knew that it was there, of a certainty, that they were going. His eyes grew almost watery with eagerness as he watched them cross over the last hill upon the Castleconnor road. Then he had thought of Breedh. She would be sitting quite alone in the house, now that even the gossoon, Oweneen, was from her, if the grasping Growneys did not make a descent upon the place like the crows in the stubbles at this time of year. His work on the land that he loved, and in regard of which his marriage had helped him towards fonder expression, did not seem of much account this blessed day. His being sighed and ached for her. Her soft face was before him, the moist, red gash of her lips, her lovely hair. His heart grew wild. His being burned to kiss her being greatly, and he knew that just now she must be thinking of him, maybe longing for him, too. It was strange to think what black, pagan sinners they were now, they who had sprung Christian-like in their beginning from the life of Dheel. In the thought of the neighbours Oliver was simply making a disgrace of himself with her, and not in any way of fondness that was good or sweet. And it was not so many years since they had both danced gladly in young innocence at the dances of Dheel. They had snatched kisses then as they leaned together over the half-door, looking as it were in childlike wonder at all the beauty now so near as to be hidden from

them ouly by the rich night flowing in light waves of darkness and mingling with soft music far over the fields of Dheel. . . . And to think how all that tender promise had narrowed down into the muddy, rutted ways of sin. . . . Sometimes a cry of lonely pity for them would seem to ring wild over the fields.

As Oliver lifted his eyes now to snatch some ease and comfort for his pain from the wide, sunny day, his hope rose gladly in bright instants, but only to vanish as swiftly beneath the long shadows falling . . . falling. . . . The meaning of all his sorrow and gladness was well hidden, surely, in the fields of Dheel. That hunger for land which came into men's hearts, with the strength of a murderous impulse from this heartless place, had much to answer for to him. How lovely women were sold into loveless slavery and how fine men sold themselves too, for love only of the disaffectionate land. One could almost of a sudden understand many of the things that Andy Giveney spoke of, the hate and power that had driven men to every expedient, even to this barter of souls, for sake of the land. But why was this done at all? Could any good come out of it, any luck, to use a thought of Dheel? It seemed to stand for the rot, like what one might have to fight in a flock of sheep that were too closely inbred. And this thought held a further aspect of truth, for here cousins were forced to marry cousins at the bidding of some arrangement greatly desired of the land. . . . And for sake of the same land was often concealed beneath a look of comfortable comeliness some dark tragedy of the home that was more intense and pitiful than anything England could ever have helped to do. Some might say that all this was primarily enforced by the same lustful power, but always there was a man's heart and his will and his soul to defeat the very worst that might be flung from the hands of the devil. Yet all strength for good was surrendered to the forces of the land.

It was sad to think of it, especially when one's thought was not as a sword of light to pierce very deep and far. . . . He struck the clods of earth beneath his feet where he was engaged in building up the ditch that had been broken temporarily to allow the drawing out of the fine yield of his field. . . . He threw down the spade now, and went furtively by a back way up through the fields to the house of Eugene Gavacan. In a few minutes he would be with her, and it would seem then like being with her for evermore.

There seemed to be a better excuse for her in what they were both doing. At least the neighbours would often say and think so. She was still a fine, sweet woman, and it was no wonder for her to be turning against the mad, hairy idiot of a man that she had married. . . .

They might have spared themselves even these words, for there was upon her the blinding wilfulness of love that broke down every scruple she might have respected. Her spirit rose in splendour now, yet this in a way was only pitiful, for the land had first bent her to do its dark will. But now her flashing eyes were held high above the green fields or the dark fields or above any colour of sorrow or of beauty that the land could cause to bloom before her. For in the summer mornings she had often gone up into the little window at the east end of the house and looked over all the waving fields of morning to where Oliver might be standing by the little lake, which was little more than a pool, at the foot of his nice nest of fields. Often she had gazed thus distantly upon him as he in the same moment saw himself clearly mirrored in that placid pool. . . .

Now she saw him at all kinds of times when Eugene would be abroad in Ballyscurlock, or frightening the crows while he destroyed the oats as well in the stubbly field. In the very room, too, where the picture of the Holy Family hung above him on the wall. . . .

. . . . . .

As Oliver crossed the last bit of a field on his way towards the house, as always a sudden qualm hurried through his conscience, and shivered his whole being. . . . It seemed such a low, mean thing to be doing this blessed day, to be taking advantage of the fact that the poor, unfortunate madman, Eugene Gavacan, had gone on a wild-goose chase of a holiday to his friends in Kiloolagh. . . . But her beauty was calling with an insistent voice which would not be denied. He bent his head in a kind of mute abasement and surrender as he went on. . . . He did not see her until he broke through the garden ditch at the back of the house. And then they met rapturously, suddenly, making of themselves a daylight delirium in the midst of the withering flowers. . . . She had been thinking of him since ever Eugene had left the house, looking with almost forlorn face out over the cruel fields which would soon put on their winter look that was less of a disguise, her heart fluttering wildly towards this moment all the while. . . . Now they went into the house with quiet deliberation. . . . They went by way of the kitchen where Oliver had saved her life on that terrible night that Oweneen had been born. The blood which had dripped from the two men in the fight still stained the flagstones of the floor. . . . In silence they went into the room. . . . Breedh had closed the shutters of the kitchen as they passed through, and now she pulled down the curtain upon the single window of the very room where she had once had the long, sad talk of love with Fanny Soraghan.

. . . . . .

The house of Eugene Gavacan for many hours that day looked like a house of the dead. . . . Oliver had not gone to his dinner, and so into Fanny's mind leaped

high the suspicion which now dominated all her thought, making her soul at once as pinched as her face was now rapidly becoming. She came often to the gate and looked far down the road to see was he coming, but not a sight of him made appearance. . . . She saw people passing the road into Ballyscurlock, and noticed the smirk of a grin they gave her as they went by. . . . Instantly she knew what it meant, for Dheel and the whole world knew that this day Eugene had gone on his famous visit to Kiloolagh. The fury of betrayal was fully expressed in her gesture as she threw her shawl about her, and went up the road past Eugene Gavacan's. She saw only the silent, sleeping house, the windows like eyes heavily lidded in shame. . . . Then she knew well why the people had grinned so loudly as they went past into Ballyscurlock. . . . And as a last flickering hope came the thought that some of them must surely tell Seumas Darcy as he stood behind the counter in Jamesey Ryan's. . . . Would the words they might drop there flash him, beyond thought of anything that had happened, into something like love, once more, of lonely, deserted her. . . . Maybe it might drive his mind into a maddened, burning hatred such as was in her very soul now for Oliver Moyles, and that he would lift his life higher than she had ever imagined it through all the lonely, empty days of her sojourn in America, doing something at long last that might be better than a lovely poem. If only they should meet! Oh Virgin Mother, if only they should meet again. . . . She would catch the horse and gallop wildly with the jaunting car towards Kiloolagh in pursuit of Eugene; and now some wild hope seemed to catch all her heart and tell her that Seumas might this day be travelling that way too. . . .

. . . .

About the time that Eugene was already half the way home from Darrigan's of Glinnan his wife and her Oliver came out into the kitchen. They lit the lamp, and she proceeded to busy herself in making tea for him. . . . They began once more to play with one another like two children living in a dream which hid from their eyes the ghastly shadow that was falling. . . .

. . . . . .

Eugene was still galloping the horse wildly along the road from Darrigan's of Glinnan. He was drunk, but it was in a most extraordinary way. The drink seemed to have concentrated his mind into an intensity that even his madness could not have produced. The eyes of old Andy Giveney were watering in fear as he clung to the front rail of the jolting car. His body was light as a feather, as they said, drink in his case making him even lighter, so that a sudden turn around a corner had almost the effect of throwing him out across the horse's back, or a sudden gust coming through a gap in the hedge of blowing him far out over the fields, where he would wander a dark brother of will-o'-the-wisp unto the end of time. The whole vehicle and its load made one of the wildest sights that had ever been seen along this particular stretch of a road.

It was only Oweneen who seemed to know where he was going. He was tearful and sleepy, and continually he shouted, "Mammy! Mammy!" as they galloped along. Occasionally, by way of variation, he would shout, "Oh, Father! Father!" But not a sound in the shape of a reply would come at all from his father, only that intense face and his whole body animated by the gesture of driving, driving. . . . Then he would shout, "Andy! Andy!" But no sound from Andy, either, so eager was he to keep his seat on the car, his wisp of a beard blowing, a distressful sign of his perilous

situation, all the while. There were moments when they seemed to drive upon the air above the road, a magic coach of anger passing swiftly with a devilish cargo, through the darkness. And so, continuously, it was only little Oweneen who seemed to know where they were going at all through power of the fear that was upon him. . . . But as soon as they began to draw out of the network of strange ways and to go down the road through Dheel, there were other calculations which seemed to enter in and make Eugene less wild and to show pretty clearly that he knew where he was going after all. He had now turned up by way of a back bye-road which led past the stubbly field. . . . At last they dismounted, unyoked the horse, and tied the reins round the gatepost of the field. They went about this business in a sort of stupefied and unreal way, as if they were proceeding only further in their wild performance. But the child seemed to know that every moment of their adventure was more real than it appeared. All their actions were but the accompaniment of a dismal gesture which extended far into fatality, and so the mind of the child was fearfully aware. Oweneen followed them with a sort of wonder holding possession of his mind as they fell and stumbled along on their way to the hiding place of the gun. . . . They scuffled and fought for a while after they had lifted it up out of the ground.

The sudden passion of his old intensity had fallen upon Andy. He insisted on carrying the gun, for it appeared, in the unchanging quality of his mind, that what he was now about to do bore an essential relation to the murderous desire of his whole life, the life from out which his every thought had always leaped at the throat of some tyrant of the land.

"Gimme a hoult of it, for pity's sake, for you know me heart was ever and always in guns and such like noble machinery."

In his semi-crazed condition, always customary, but now intensified by all the drink he had taken at Darrigan's of Glinnan, he seemed to think that the shooting of one, at least, of all the landlords he had never shot in his mind was just at hand in reality. They walked down through the fields towards the house, where the grass was lush and dewy beneath the harvest moon. The light of the kitchen window suddenly appeared big and inviting through the light darkness of the windy evening. . . . They crept up through the yard, taking great care not to make a noise, Andy, out of the devilment that was so much a part of him, creating a momentary diversion and delay by telling them that this was exactly the way Simon Lennon, that valiant man, had crept up to the window of Sir Peter Seagrave's house in 1879 and shot the inhuman tyrant stark and stiff in his own drawingroom. . . . There was caution in this incident of reminiscence, for it would have been confusing just at this moment to have referred to the ancestor of Breedh, the famous Growney who had shot the infamous Marlay.

As chance would have it the lower portion of the window was upraised, and there were the two of them, Oliver and Breedh, sitting upon a low stool by the fire, and now suddenly full in the eyes of Andy and full in the eyes of Eugene. The voices of warning from the spirits in the air were unheard by them, for they were deep in the oblivion of love and the arms of each were clasped about the other. . . . They were blind to all the terror that had moved in so close to them from out the night of the life that had been forced upon them by the pitiless fields.

Eugene lifted up little Oweneen so that his eyes, too, might be filled.

" Look ! " he said, whispering with great caution, low but intense, purposeful, and passionate. " D'ye remember, Oweneen, the sheaves, the sheaves ! "

Eugene was now almost completely sane in this moment whose purpose was the fulfilment of his madness. He was about to cause the innocent child to kill this defamer of his house. It at once appeared a just ending, and yet black and monstrous that such an extension of justice should be.

"The sheaves! the sheaves!" he whispered again, as he placed the gun in position in the hands of the child until its muzzle rested upon the sill. Then very carefully he cocked the trigger, and at the same time moved the barrel slightly so that the range was improved.

The slight click which sounded as the hammers were pulled backward caused Oliver to turn sharply. He saw the figures at the window, and although but dimly comprehending, rose in the sudden terror of discovery. He sprang towards the window. But just then the shot rang out. It made a momentary bright flash which lit up all the kitchen, and then there was the heavy thud of a falling body, the shattering glass of the oil lamp that had lit the kitchen, a scream, then darkness and no more sound. . . .

"Begad, another landlord shot!" spluttered Andy, this with diabolical clearness in the intense, silent moment which followed. Then little Oweneen spoke almost tremulously as if suddenly stricken by terror at what he had just done.

"The sheaves, daddy! the sheaves! I'm after smashing them!"

There was another long moment of ghastly silence before Andy began to mutter to himself as he hobbled away from the window.

"The peelers now, the peelers, be the holy!" he went on screeching almost inwardly, as he hurried, in the sudden sobriety of fear, out of the yard and down the road. . . . Henceforth upon this evening was manifested the real Andy Giveney. His rhetorical

vehemence had been at all times but a cloak which now fell away, revealing in sudden despicability the petty informer. There had been many a feud, ending almost in murder, that he had caused to blaze up out of the smouldering venom of his mind, and a little later he had gone to the peelers with the whole story. Thus, whenever Andy would give out his opinion upon any notable question of the day in its direct relation to some newly-arrived leader it was always coloured by this aspect of his personality :

" He's in the pay of the Castle, now, believe you me ! " Then a dry spit into the ashes and his head bent low to listen for any word that might be dropped, so that he might give it out a little later as an index to the character of the person about whom he was speaking.

He was truly in his element now, and so more nearly human, as he ran down the road into Ballyscurlock, and met the sergeant and a constable coming on patrol up towards the fields of Dheel. . . . Immediately he was spluttering out his story :

" Sure, the whole world knew that we were going off on the great holiday entirely to Kiloolagh. And it's a fine, enjoyable time we had of it, surely, at the half-way house of Darrigan's of Glinnan, Eugene being in a wide, jovial, sociable kind of mood. But what with Shameen Darcy, bad luck to him ! coming in a terrible pucker to tell Eugene what was happening in his absence, and the wife of Oliver, ugly Fansheen, arriving a little later to tell him, mebbe, the same yarn, he drove back just the same as if there was about seventeen devils after catching a hoult of him. D'ye know now, that it was a pity of the world ever the gun was left with him so that he might do the damage."

This last part of the message was subtly said for Andy, and caused the sergeant in some affright to suddenly remember his part in the murder.

" Begad, mebbe I'm an accessory before the fact ! " he murmured to himself.

His first concern now was that the gun should be hidden. . . . It was the cause that hurried him towards the house, old Andy blowing hard and limping painfully as he tried to keep up behind. But in spite of his distress, he knew what was presently running through the sergeant's mind, and it was the thought that it would take a good many bags of potatoes to make up for the loss of a Government job. Later, when they entered the tragic house, they found Oliver Moyles dead in his blood, and Breedh quite unscathed, although she had fainted away and lying by his side, her hair all fallen out in the red pool. Eugene and Oweneen they did not discover after much searching until the dawn. They found them sleeping by the ruined stack of broken, shot-blown sheaves. In the cold autumn morning the stubbly field and the house below it looked pitiful, and there seemed to be some kind of a mist of pity still lying darkly far over the fields of Dheel. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

The murder was hushed up as effectively as all concerned could manage it. Eugene was sent to Mullaghowen Asylum once more, and later as a dangerous lunatic to another asylum near Dublin, although he laughed in the sane, easy way of one who could with truth make denial on the morning they had arrested him. . . . Soon even the wild echoes of the tragedy died in fugitive whispers down the fields of Dheel. It was better for the peace of several parties not to be talking about something which reminded them so insistently of their own guilt in it. And so it was grand to feel the wind from over the fields blowing all thoughts of it from their minds by degrees. Their excuse for every deed and its atonement seemed to lie hidden always somewhere beneath the great quiet of the fields. It was surely a bitter experience for any woman to have known, and now the face of Breedh seemed suddenly blanched by sorrow, until it was even as the face of Fanny. But still it held the lingering traces of a fine comeliness, for although it was the land that had done all this to her, still it was the land that excused her affliction. It was a pity, they said, that she was not altogether a widow, for she might still make a grand wife for a man. No one quite knew into what relation with the life around her she might yet move, but there was no one who did not think it a pity that Eugene was not dead and gone, only dying a lingering kind of death, that was, of course, too good for him, in a terrible lunatic asylum. Often they were driven to say that it was a pitiful kind of thing how now it was Fanny who was the real widow and she not much to look at . . The pity of Breedh grew greater

as she drove often into Ballyscurlock in the high trap, her half-idiot of a son, Oweneen, now springing heavy and loutish, sitting up beside her and he whacking the horse with a big stick. . . .

For a long time a tremendous bitterness had simmered low between the two lonely women, between Breedh and Fanny. It would always leap crying into the memory, this thought of how it was the bartered beauty of Breedh that had desolated so unhappily the lives of all four, who had grown up together as children. It was a pitiful thing to think of one woman robbing another of her man. And all of them had loved one another once in the sunlit innocence of childhood. There was a cruelty in remembering the enduring kindliness that this should have made down through all the years of their lives. But through loneliness of winter, loneliness of summer, the fields smiled on. The long years were but as unchanging moments to those whose eyes were never lifted from the unchanging fields.

One dark night about two years after the murder, as Fanny sat alone by the fire in her quiet, lonely house, thinking, perhaps half-dreaming into a forgiveness that was still wild with sorrow, remembering her young days perhaps, her days in America, and Mr. Conway, whom she fancied was surely one of the greatest authors in the world now, there was a lifting of the latch. People of Dheel would often come in like this without as much as saying " By your leave ! " to talk with her about many things that only led her always to mirror herself in the pool of sadness which her life had become, the muddiest slough that the world had ever seen, and to advise her, with a great show of lugubrious pity, upon all the ways in which she could easily prevent the land she had from going to the bad on her entirely. . . . But as the door was opened now the faces of two men looked white and excited against the dark night outside. The

visitors were Andy Giveney, fierce in his gesture as always, the flickering embers of a flame which it almost seemed would never blow out in Dheel, and Seumas Darcy, who, in spite of all that had happened, still wore upon his face a look of longing for her still. . . . He was smiling towards her now with a smile that almost caused, so bitter-sweet was it, a curse to spring into her very heart. Why was he coming to her now? Why couldn't he leave her alone with all the torment of her life? The day she had left him in the tap-room of Darrigan's of Glinnan should have been sufficient to show that her mind was fixed, for all she might do a wild thing in a moment of madness. But it seemed an impossible conception that a man should think of a woman as rising up from the ruins of her life and beauty to be beauty's queen, to enjoy great love without that humbling which is of the clay. He flashed into her life now, a stark figure fully significant of all pain and sorrow, in an intense moment. . . . He had improved himself, it was true, since the day of her return, when all the glory of her constant love for him had been murdered most foully and left bleeding in the dust. He had improved himself, surely, but only that he might now appear before her as meanly once more as in the tap-room of Darrigan's of Glinnan. There had been wild moments of beauty when she had almost hoped, equally for his sake as for her own, that he might not do as he had done then, that abominable attempt at final desolation. But he had. He had. For this she had since hated him with a deep and secret hatred that was greater than her heart had known on the dark day she had returned only to see him drunk in Jamesey Ryan's of Ballyscurlock.

There was a certain strangeness about the fact that these two men should now appear here in company. But it showed very clearly how far Seumas had advanced into the continuously compromising quality of the life

in which he was fixed that he should have made up his quarrel with this old man, who stood in some sense of sinister connection with every effort that was here made along the lines of the land. . . . Seumas had advanced considerably, in the eyes of the people. He had become what they called " a success " in Ballyscurlock. It was whispered in many a place that the money he had heretofore taken from his employer in drink he now took in cash. This, probably, in addition to every penny he earned was devoted to the purpose of purchasing cattle and calves, which he put out to grass with many a drunkard here and there who would often be obliged to borrow money for more drink from him in the shop. If only he had a bit of land ; if only, for instance, he could marry into a bit of land. His eyes were wide opened always in quest of his chance, for he had given up reading romances, and become a realist. There was Fanny, still with a fine bit of land and the man murdered on her. . . . Maybe she would be thinking of him now in the lonely evenings by the fire with a kind of yearning which leaped out into communion with the constant thought of his mind. And this was his only effort of fond recollection retained from all the romantic reading he had done. But so powerful in her was the tradition of the land that, thinking of all these things now of a sudden, some kind of admiration began to stir in her, some kind of pride in the thought of his return even by such means as he must be using, to the money and comfort and independence of the land. It was very strange, this feeling now, after all he had done to her, his destruction of her dream of him, and how he was the final cause of her break with Mr. Conway, the brilliant author and beautiful young man of whom she had just been thinking and dreaming, as ever almost into tears. . . . Now almost amazingly was she without rancour for him. . . . Almost trembling with the excitement of this did she

remember the usual courtesies of the fields that was demanded of her by the very fact of their visit, two neighbours, anyway, if one could think of them that way.

She made them welcome and brought them into the little, musty, unfrequented parlour. . . . In the still, narrow place there rang out the clink of glasses as the drinks were placed before them. Andy Giveney began immediately to use the expression " widow," evidently not without some purpose in the very implication of its sound, as often as he could make it possible.

" The widow here ! " he would say, and " What does the widow think ? " and so on. How clearly all the hatred that was more than half fear, and which the fields should feel for this old scoundrel of the land, was now mirrored in her gaze. . . . Already was moving in a full suggestion of the business of the evening. Andy had thrown out a hint of the fine number of cattle that Seumas had at grass with the men who were drinking their farms in Jamesey Ryan's. Further he added this with a loud smirk :

" Sure, be the holy, and d'ye know what I'm going to tell you. It's a fellow like him that would mebbe get anunder one of their stuck-up daughters when they'd see the land and all its stinking pride for them on the verge of passing out of their hands. Them that's foolish and they young often get to be wise and conniving and powerful before their latter end. In a case like that if a gerrl that really has her heart set on him only wants to be sensible and true to herself she'd overlook the past and think only of the man's future. Aye, indeed, indeed, and begorras aye ! "

As they sat there, Seumas shy and Andy fairly certain of purpose, she seemed to remain sadly apart as she went on playing, now with the corkscrew, now with the glass which stood by her hand. Her eyes looked out and were caught in the look which was flowing softly from the eyes of Seumas. . . . She had sudden re-

membrance, her mind more brightly lit than ever, of the lofty letters she had been accustomed to receive from him down the length of the long time she had been working in the quick-lunch restaurant in Tremont Street, Boston. Those high-flown reminders of the place where she was born had meant much to her then. Indeed, through the overwhelming power of dear remembrance, they meant so much to her still that she could almost forgive him the disillusionment he had wrought upon her return to the cruelty of the black-hearted fields and childlessness which is the sorrow of the world. This was the condition to which she had returned, rather than to the full, unquestioned loveliness and beauty of Holy Ireland. It was an ending so pitiful as almost sufficed, in its even momentary intense realisation, to call up a flood of tears. Yet now the one whom the loveless fields had forced her to marry was dead and gone, and so she might look with favour and think with delight upon Seumas Darcy once more. . . . And to have remembered Darrigan's of Glinnan was to remember as well that both of them had had a hand together in the doom that had befallen. The man she had been forced to marry was taken from her in his blood and in his sin . . . in the blackest offence that a man could commit, and she must be compelled to endure his betrayal of her still had he lived on. . . . After all, what was it, even remotely as terrible as this, that Seumas had ever done to her? Why, what he had done must surely have hurt his own poor self far more. . . . And yet, and yet. . . . The unfaithfulness of all men was in what he had done. She had believed in him. Dear God, how she had believed in him and loved him with the truest devotion, and yet he had been unable to keep himself from degradation for love of her. . . . It would require a great forgiveness, and this flood of kindliness did not suddenly swell up to her need in this terrible moment. Her bosom

was heaving with distress, and her heart was thumping loudly. . . . To think of all the beauty with which she had once surrounded her every thought of him as unable to return and do anything for her now. . . . Ah, no, nor never again. Sometimes a word of comfort flew lonely out from the fields of Dheel. A thing like this might often be said to a girl whose thoughts of love would have of a sudden known some wintry desolation. " Troth, musha, now don't give up heart, acushla, for you know it's very, very easy, so it is, to rekindle again the half-burned coal." But now there was no rekindling in her breast that had been lashed by the tempest which was still loud with fury around her, leaving everything quenched and wet and cold. . . .

She was not listening now to the deceitful dribble out of Andy Giveney's mouth about the lasting kindliness of the land. The fields, the smiling fields of Dheel, over which she had wandered young and wild with this man now sitting hopeful and expectant of her upon the other side of the table, were beautiful surely, at the noon of summer, or even when the long shadows were lifting or falling, and the best things on earth for which a man and woman might die. Yet they had wrought only her desolation and this wild sobbing of her heart.

The land, the bitter, relentless land. It seemed in the sudden, afflicted moment of compelled comparison that there was almost a lasting kindliness to be snatched on the hard streets of Boston in America, some lovely human pity, some constant coming towards one of the boon of love. . . . And now here was that monkeyish figure still bodying forth the virtues of the land. . . . Even as a child there had always appeared something of evil in this ancient, undying man, but now he was really the very devil himself gathering all of torment he could make with an ever wilder rage of flame about her soul . . . It almost seemed in an

intense, mad moment as if the unspoken anger of her defeated love must make him dumb and drive him forth to end his life in some green, slimy ditch of Dheel. . . . Already he was leaving the room, but on the excuse of putting a coal to his pipe in the kitchen. It was the only opportunity he could contrive to take of leaving them alone to do the rest for themselves, after the valiant prelude of his matrimonial talk. . . . The eyes of Seumas and the eyes of Fanny met straight and fair. . . . It seemed as if each face was new and clear in the light of the flame that had here been made. He saw her faded, faded and worn, with all promise of motherhood gone from her sad, sunken eyes, and what middling young man was there of Dheel, or, indeed, of any other place amongst the fields who had ever thought of marrying a farm without thinking as well, however distantly, of marrying a woman who might bring him more than land. . . . She saw him, mean and low and cunning, less fine by far in this moment than in that wherein she had hated him almost abysmally. Already to its full meanness had he the look of the little people with the little eyes. These eyes of his were small and mean and elongated swinishly. And yet they were the eyes of one who had once seen so greatly as to cause him to write a poem.

"Have I not amended my life?"

Even the fine word, "amended," almost a word from the lovely letters he had sent her out to Boston, stuck there in the middle of his speech, sounded remarkably queer, remarkably mean, also, and ugly. As if anything like that at all mattered in the smallest now. She laughed a long, low, curious laugh which was full of the sorrow of a childless woman, the sorrow of the world. It smote him with the great pain that was hers. . . . The hope he had reared about his mind fell smashed at the very base of his soul. . . . All the brave talk he had had coming up the road with Andy

Giveney, a full rehearsal of the things he was to say, was only dumbness in his mouth. . . . She surely looked old and ugly in the damp, unfrequented room. He could hear Andy Giveney falling over things in the kitchen as he sought the dying fire in search of a light for his pipe. . . . He could hear the old man muttering to himself and laughing wildly between his ravings. He knew that this surely was the echo of his final desolation, yet even to the very last does some mad hope clutch wildly at despair. He threw out his arms to embrace her tenderly, but she pushed him from her roughly, and withered him with angry, passionate exclamations. . . . And with the last flickering sounds of her anger he knew that she was gone out of his life for evermore.

CHAPTER IX

The years were again slipping quietly over the fields of Dheel, and more quiet with the passage of time had grown the people who lived here. The waves that rose high out of the fields by night or day beat less fiercely against their souls, for being now far less young the people of this story of broken love did not stand up so high or shining to tempt the dark power of the fields. No grand love stories came suddenly out of the life around them, and they themselves were passing quietly into the end of their story. There had fallen over Dheel one of those periods like the end of an era in the history of some tragic country when the forces of warfare were resting in heavy sleep before returning to the fray. One end of this lonely multitude knew the stillness of the very young years, the other that much greater and grander quiet which falls before the coming of the end. Perhaps the rumour of greater conflicts was beginning to echo out of the heart of the fields, like long-lost shouts booming up out of lonely caverns, to engage already in a battle that was unseen with the whispers of doom which ever rose up to commingle with the winds that still blew in beauty over the fields in spite of all that had happened here.

The "ancient lovers" were now no more, but now their strong compulsion could, anyhow, be only a thing of small avail, seeing that there were few people of marriageable age in all the wide circle of this grassy place. Yet their memory lingered still, and the deplorable, unChristian fact that they had gone unwedded to the grave. Lingered also the almost undimmed remembrance of all the great love stories of these parts—the story of Mary Galway and Shaun Glynn, of Ellen Hynes, as

well as the story, also, of James Lenihan. The quality of life, too, into which the whole population of Dheel had slipped made memorable the loveless and yet greatly loving end of Breedh Growney.

Never a ripple of love or passion stirred the life of the fields to even the slight extent that the grass was stirred on a summer day by a gladsome mixture of sun and wind. It grew to hold that quality which is almost perfect stillness, a timeless thing in a tideless place. But a strange reconciliation had come to pass. Fanny and Breedh were again the good friends, almost the great and constant companions of their childhood days. The son, Oweneen, had been sent to the asylum, where his father, Eugene, was still alive. Seumas Darcy had become almost the magnate of Dheel, and the years had increased him. A fine lump of a man, surely, as they all said, and it seemed a pity of the world that he had not married. He had beaten the fields in all save one turn of "besting." The fields had beaten his love, and, strong though his sense of obvious mastery was now, he was always fully conscious of his real defeat as Connor Caffrey at any fair of Ballyscurlock in the days gone by. The fields had beaten the loves of all of them, for it was the queer way they had married. Sometimes even the priest of the parish would be driven to speak his mind and to tell Seumas (who was now always called "James," and had been given the letters "J.P." to hang on to the other end of his name) that it was a shame for a man of his means to be unmarried. It was not Christian-like nor beholden to him as a Catholic. This was a truth that would most clearly appear as the magnate went about the very places which had seen the birth of his dream that had died, his body looking big and obscene in the sunlight. Ah, yes. The fields of Dheel had won. Even when a man triumphed like this over the forces which had gone to create such tyrants as Colonel Montagu Marlay it was the fields that would

have won all the same, for love must also be in the heart of him who takes, but there could be no fine taking here, because the fields never gave to love. What man had ever there been of Dheel who could say with truth that he was not fiercely begrudged the land to which he came into possession by another set or crew, as he might call them, who felt darkly that the land had denied them ?

As a symbol of all the ugliness of the fight sat Andy Giveney, now past his hundredth year, unable to travel any longer from his little cabin, before which he would sit in the long summer days cursing and muttering to himself.

There was a little joy for all anger fled away from them, their faces grown into the white, kindly countenances of old women, Fanny and Breedh would sit on low stools by the fire talking, talking even on a summer day. . . . All the wild anger of sex had been burned out of them and they were like children again. And as if to further signify their return to this second gladness they would often go walking through gilded May evenings towards the crab-tree orchard to see the trees in bloom. They would saunter quietly along the grass-grown boreen between the fields, the very fields that had made them so fearful in their young days, but which were now all held upon the eleven months system by James Darcy, Esq., J.P. In the uncertain light of the later evening, as they passed back from their walk, they would remind one of themselves as children, of the old, old days when, with ringing laughter now stifled into a poor sound by the sorrow of the years, they had passed this way. . . . Sometimes their arms would steal around one another, and the light scarlet shawl falling down, maybe, from off the shoulders of Breedh, Fanny would gather it up, all the poetry of forgiveness in the gentle movements of her hands, and fold it around the other faded woman. They would stop then to listen to the corncrake making his loud sound all down through the fields of Dheel. . .

MAY 1921

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